issue number 13

7

modern music on cue

Issue 13

The Exclusive 7ball London Interview With

Issue 13

Much Afraid

Also Featured:

DIME STORE PROPHETS
CHRISTINE GLASS
MICHAEL KNOTT
LOUDFLOWER
SPLIT LEVEL
BLACKBALL
And More...

KEVIN SMITH interviews MICHAEL BEEN of THE CALL

The Survivors Strike Back

SACRE "We're Not Hardcore"

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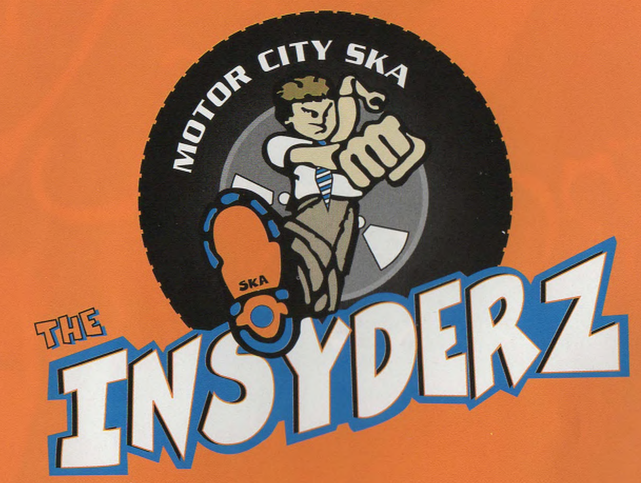

availabe now from gumshoe records.

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issue number 13

I picked up *7ball* on issue number 4, and even though it was only 34 pages long it still was packed with great content. Now here it is issue # 12 and the magazine has blossomed to 68 pages. But one thing has not changed—the strong content. You guys really do seek to represent Christ and the musicians that love him as best you can. May God Bless You —

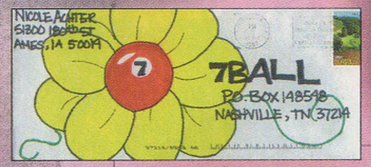
L8ter,

Brett Morgan

Clearwater, FL

Puddin5@ix.netcom.com

[Thanks for the encouragement. We are hoping to keep 7ball at the same size and quality to which you've become accustomed.]



I think sometimes your reviews go a little heavy on the opinions rather than the actual group or album in question.

Punk for Christ,

Tim Kilbourn

rkilbourn@earthlink.net

First of all I really enjoy your mag. It's really cool. The interviews are great and the artists are usually really honest. The reviews are pretty good too. But I was sorta upset to see what you said about the Spooky Tuesday album in your May/June 1997 issue. You said that the production values could be better. I believe that their newest CD is very honest and sincere. You also said that it had enough charm to win over "a few more unsuspecting ears." What are you saying?? That people won't like it unless they don't pay alot of attention to what is being played?? I like the album, but other than your slightly negative review, you had a great mag.

Still enjoying the mag,

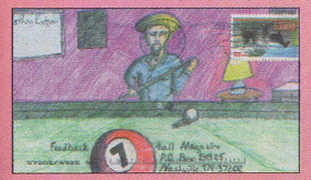
Daniel

ccmfreak@aol.com

This magazine rules! I love the honest reviews, and you guys seem to always get interviews with the hottest bands going.

Eric Peterson

Byron, Minnesota



I just wanted to write and thank you for your insightful words on the Christian music industry in the recent issue of *7ball*.

As editor of Kamikaze magazine for five years, I had a love-hate relationship with Christian music that resulted in some serious soul-searching and, unfortunately, a few cheap shots at the industry.

I think you underscored the dangers and the pitfalls of Christian music very well in your article, and I want to encourage you and your readers to continue to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Steve Knight

Steiger International

Minneapolis, MN

I'm in my mid '20s and have been part of the Christian industry as a promoter for several years. I don't want to offend any one who believes in the marketing of Christianity, but come on guys, let's show it with our lives. We have lost sight of who we are, for a marketable image.

So, I wish in the article on "The State of the Industry," you would have included 5 Minute Walk Records. This is an example of a company that has kept their faith, not in big marketable ways, but by just doing. I hope there was a reason that Frank Tate wasn't a part of this article.

Jon Brayles

[Mr. Tate was out of the United States during our deadline and was unavailable for comment. But we have nothing but the utmost respect for Tate, his label, and the bands he represents.]

Thought I'd tell you that the most recent issue (Hype) was a killer! I was very impressed with the profiles of the new faces in modern music—thanx so much for keeping us informed and out of the dark!

Steve Tudor

Hey, I think it's time to do a write up on Dear Ephesus, since they were one of the only unsigned bands to play at the GAS tour in Kissimmee, Fl.

Chris Conner

West Palm Beach, Fla.

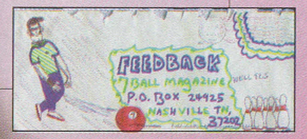
[Look for more on Dear Ephesus in our Sept./Oct. issue.]

I'm a journalism student, and one of my future goals is to encourage young people to read (especially Christians), to increase their knowledge and appreciation of their faith. I saw the article about Archangels and was pleased, but how about more book reviews? I don't think the nature of your magazine confines the subject matter to music only. Please don't limit the potential impact *7ball* can have among Christian youth!

Just some thoughts,

Chris Hale

[See Media Watch for an interview with author Sigmund Brouwer.]



You guys rock! I am very glad I subscribed to the magazine. I love the online stuff too. It is cool that a Christian music mag is reaching so many people all over. Your magazine has opened my eyes to new artists and given me further insight into artists I already love.

Nicole Achter

Ames, Iowa

From: Jon Kortebein
<jkortebein@pointgrp.com>
To: *7ball@7ball.com*
Subject: The Message Board!!!!

I'm having a ball (pun intended) on the message board. It gets a little chippy once and a while, but the discussions are interesting and fun. Definitely keep that thing going.

Just a shout out to the boys (and girls) @ *7ball* magazine. I was sitting in detention scoping out the latest mag and wanted to say it was great. Sadly, we only get such a fine piece of literature every two months. Loved the reviews of such bands as Dime Store Prophets, Plumb and my personal fave, The Insyderz. Just wanted to say that I appreciate the insight in on what is what and who is who in modern christian music.

Dublinist@aol.com

A BIG THANKS to our fans at *7ball* magazine. They have been covering us for a long time, and they have supported us through the years. We recommend picking up a copy from your local Christian book seller.

Kirby Trapolino

Caedmon's Call

(from band's online newsletter)

I just want to let you know there aren't any Christian radio stations around where I live, so I rely on your magazine for information and it's a great source. You rule!

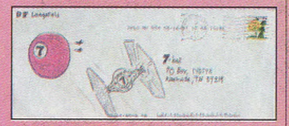
One of your biggest fans!

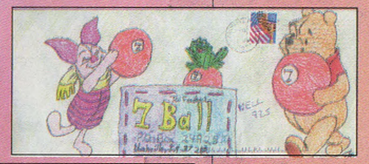
I think *7ball* is my favorite magazine. My friends and I started bringing Christian magazines and CDs to school. We have also brought some of the kids to Christian concerts. There are still kids who make fun of us because we are Christians. But we have a lot of people at school listening to groups like the Supertones (everyone seems to love them). Thanks for making an awesome mag.

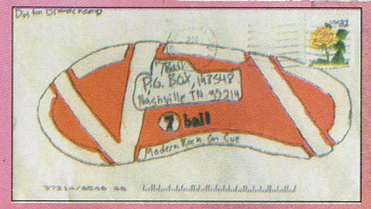
Dustin Grandchamp

Hartselle, Ala.

[Tell your friends who love The Supertones not to miss our in-depth story on the band in this issue.]







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2nd anniversary issue
number 13

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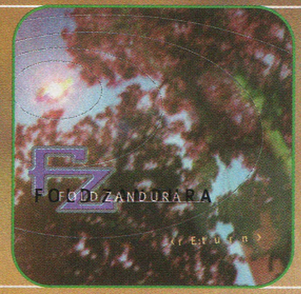

- The modern pop-core sounds of Ruby Joe and Spud Puddle!

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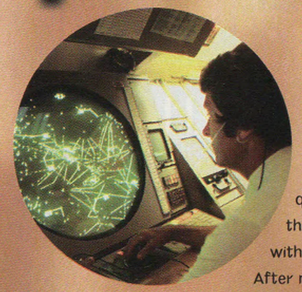
seven city news



Well, loyal *7ball*ites, the technicians at *7ball* Laboratories have been hard at work. While we still haven't quite found Sam Beckett (or Waldo, for that matter), we do think we've come up with the next level of *7ball* mega-citement! After much trial and error (and odd screams during experiments gone horribly awry), we've come up with a COMPACT DISC! Not just ANY compact disc, mind you, but the *7ball* GAS COLLECTION, in association with the Independent Alliance! Limited copies of the May/June issue included the first volume, with 17 tracks from your favorite and brand-new artists. The tests are going so well that the second volume can be found with select copies of the July/Aug issue. The new collection includes 15 songs and a bonus CD-ROM segment! And these are full-length songs, because we only want the best for you! The songs are courtesy of: THE SUPERTONES (from their new record, *Supertones Strike Back!*); THIRD DAY (a sneak preview of *Conspiracy #5*); CIRCLE OF DUST (a sneak preview of *Disengage*); STAVESACRE (from *Absolutes*); STARFLYER 59 (from *Americana*); something new from VELOUR 100; music from newcomers SQUAD 5-0 (punk), ZILCH (modern pop rock), BRAINWASH PROJECTS (hip hop), THE ELECTRICS (Celtic rock), CHRISTINE GLASS (cool triple-A) and THE ALTERED (modern pop rock). The songs are bookended by two versions of the song "Flood"-a special, heretofore unreleased "electric guitar" mix from JARS OF CLAY, and the "Suave *7ball* Mix" of the lounge version from JOHN JONETHIS. The disc will also include an exclusive CD-ROM segment of the conversation between MICHAEL BEEN of The Call and KEVIN MAX SMITH of dc Talk. If you want to be the first on your block to get future volumes, check out the subscription ad on page 53.

"Buddy Tattoo says breakfast is the most important meal of the day!"

Those guys in Seven Day Jesus are nuts

Speaking of that lounge guy, he has hidden lounge tracks tucked away on records from Sub*Lime, including Fold Zandura, Honey, Kosmos Express and Silage, but until now you could only find him a song at a time. Well, start combing the leopard skin, baby, because lounge guru John Jonethis is releasing LOUNGE FREAK in August, with hip, space-age bachelor pad arrangements of Christian rock songs from MxPx, dc Talk, The Supertones, Audio Adrenaline and Plumb, among others. Watch for his "Flood" video, with special guests Jars of Clay.

Forget what you think you know about Third Day: Their soph release, *Conspiracy No. 5*, features a bigger leap than you might expect. Given that their first record was actually made *years* ago (most of that record was actually released twice before they signed with Reunion), they've grown immensely as songwriters, performers and showmen. Matched with producer Sam Taylor (King's X, Galactic Cowboys), *Conspiracy No. 5* is a record with a lot more variety, a lot more maturity — and it rocks! Look for it in August.

Our bud Matt Slocum of SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER has been playing the cello a lot lately. Most recently, he appeared on the Mother's Day episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (oh, yeah, and Amy Grant was singing, too).

If you're anywhere close to the CORNERSTONE FESTIVAL this year, spin that radio dial and search for "Cornerstone Radio." The National Association of Christian Rock Radio and the Pure Rock Report (with the help of Sub*Lime and Jesus People USA) are putting together a temporary radio station for the duration of the festival (July 2-6, although the station may actually run from the day before the fest until the day after). The station will run 24 hours a day, with blocks of rave, indie and underground music, as well as healthy doses of Pure Rock Radio hits. They also expect the signal to be strong enough that you can pick the station up driving back and forth to the site from the nearby hamlet of Bushnell, Ill.

Cling Recordings is sponsoring a benefit concert for MORTIFICATION'S STEVE ROWE (who recently suffered a relapse with his cancer), July 19 at the University of Miami. Call (305) 274-9818.

Scott's dad says, "Even a blind hog can find an acorn once in a while."

Those wacky kids in The Altered are certainly making waves. They have endorsement deals going with both Vans shoes and Street Rod clothing. They have three new videos, all directed by Peter King: "Low," "Two Different Things" and "John's Lament." BTW, the band does not actually appear anywhere in "John's Lament," but the video does feature some of the best extreme surfing we've ever seen. We've been told the three videos will be available in stores in a few months; in the meantime, you can pester your local Christian video outlet. The Altered lately have also been seen on the road with both Insyderz and Skillet, and are putting together something for the fall.

Although modern rock fans are sometimes skeptical of DC TALK—when they don't even play instruments, it's hard to refer to them as a "band"—they've proven on record and on the road that they are great singers and performers, and smart enough to surround themselves with great musicians. A recent benefit at Nashville's Caffe Milano showed they know how to have fun, as well, reinventing their old songs for the new format, and reworking some great cover tunes, including an aerobic disco medley that rocked the house. The new video *Welcome to the Freak Show* gives fans and naysayers alike a chance to see for themselves that dc Talk may not be band, but they do know how to rock.

PHIL KEAGGY and his band GLASS HARP finally saw the release-albeit 26 years late-of their legendary "lost" album Live! At Carnegie Hall. Originally slated to be the group's third album, the tapes from the Carnegie Hall show were long thought to be destroyed. But the band's engineer found high-quality copies, and restored most of Glass Harp's set for this collection. In conjunction with the disc's release, Glass Harp recently played a reunion concert at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, where visitors can see a display of Glass Harp artifacts through September.

Dear Ephesus

The folks at BulletProof (a division of the lovely Gray Dot, Inc.) have signed Orlando, Fla.'s DEAR EPHESUS (we'd like to think it happened because they played the Orlando GAS Tour concert last spring, but that might be tootin' our own horn too loudly). Look for an album this fall.

Our researchers at *7ball* Laboratories have discovered an uncanny connection between the debut from ALL STAR UNITED and the Gene Wilder film WILLY WONKA AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY. If you cue up the movie on the VCR and start the record right after the lion roars for the third time, there are reportedly several instances where All Star United makes for an alternate soundtrack. The members of the band deny any deliberate connection. Judge for yourself.

Well, this brings us to the end of another action-packed, explosive installment of the THE SEVEN CITY NEWS! Be sure and send your news items, fruitcakes and other assorted contraband!

Excelsior!

This month, PRISM MAGAZINE releases a benefit CD titled *Demonstrations of Love*. All proceeds, including performance royalties, directly benefit the ministries of Evangelicals for Social Action and PRISM magazine. ESA has been around for 20 years, provoking Christians to cultural engagement, especially in the areas of racial reconciliation and helping the poor. Among the disc's 16 songs are 11 tracks exclusive to the collection, including songs by Rick Elias, Rich Mullins, Jimmy A, Mike Roe, Steve Taylor and Ashley Cleveland. For info about the ministry, call(800) 650-6600.

TODAY'S TOPIC: DO YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL?
DATE: MARCH 9, 1997
TOWN: NASHVILLE, TN

THE RESURRECTION OF A GENERATION

SUNDAY NIGHT IN NASHVILLE. THE NEXT DAY, SEVEN YOUNG ADULTS WITH DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT THEIR LIVES AND THEIR WORLD WOULD EMBARK ON A WEEKLONG TRIP WITH AUDIO ADRENALINE, DISCUSSING THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT THIS GENERATION. THE ROAD PASTOR, JIM BURGENS, WAS THERE TO ENCOURAGE THE DISCUSSION. I WAS THERE TO REPORT ON IT. BUT IT WAS THOSE SEVEN PEOPLE—FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, WITH DIFFERENT QUESTIONS AND NEEDS—WHO MADE THE SEVEN-DAY JOURNEY THAT TAKES PLACE ON THE AVCD© SINGLE "SOME KIND OF ZOMBIE" AND THE BOOK *SOME KIND OF ZOMBIE: THE RESURRECTION OF A GENERATION.*

During our time in Nashville, we see the sights. Hard Rock Cafe. Planet Hollywood. The Nashville Speedway (where we see the Audio Adrenaline-sponsored NASCAR car, and meet its driver, Bam Dixon).

We also sit and talk. Jim opens the day's topic—"Do You Know How I Feel?"— by asking the group to share embarrassing moments from their life.

"It was my freshman year in high school," recalls Lisa, 21, from Huntington Beach, Calif. "I'd already had two tardies in one class and a few of my friends and I were running through the hall because we didn't want to be late. There were a lot of people waiting in the hall outside the class. When we were running, I didn't just fall, I did a total face plant and my lips touched the ground. It was really embarrassing. I got up, went to class and recuperated. I was grateful I was new at school and not many people knew who I was."

Chad, 18, from Littleton, Colo., recounts a misadventure from when he was in the 6th grade: "The church where my dad was minister had this really advanced intercom system. One Sunday, while he was giving his sermon, my friend and I were down in the fellowship hall playing on the intercom system.

"My dad heard it and announced to everyone, 'Oh, that's my son.' I didn't know what was going on. Some people thought it was a fire alarm. One whole Sunday School class left the building, so my dad had to talk to them. They were cool about the whole thing, but everybody knows you because you're the pastor's son."

John, 18, of Mission Viejo, Calif., remembers one Thanksgiving with his family: "I was wearing baggy shorts. My dad and I were washing dishes. Well, my dad tried to be funny and pulled down my pants, but accidentally pulled down both my shorts and my

boxers. My whole family was there. I couldn't drop the dishes and there was nothing I could do to pull them up." Then, Jim asks: *Why would a God of love let you suffer?*

"In hard times, before I walked with God, it was like a numbness came over me," says Scotia, 20, from Bowie, Md. "I hardened my heart. I didn't know that I could handle it through God. The only way I knew to handle it was to numb myself. But now, I don't get too excited, and I don't get overwhelmed. Sometimes it's hard for me to acknowledge when I don't feel good. I tried to seek fulfillment in a number of ways and never achieved it. Then, I realized I definitely needed to try God. When I did, I said I'm definitely not going back."

David, 17, of Dallas, asks her why things are different now. "Do you think people who know God are afraid to deal with it, or do you think they just don't want to?"

"I think people deal with things the best way they know how to survive," Scotia replies. "Depression can lead to denial and it can damage your emotions when you suppress it. What happens is that you let it dwell within you. Then you find out the only way that is long lasting is through God."

Vicki, 20, Danville, Calif., agrees: "I think that's why I have such a hard time accepting God or His help, because I just tug through everything. I can go on and I don't trip out. I can just go through life, so it's hard for me to say, because I can say I got to this point in my life and I am doing all right."

—Ginny McCabe

Some Kind of Zombie: The Resurrection of a Generation *will be available as an AVCD© from ForeFront in August, and a book from Standard Publishing in October.*

AUDIO ADRENALINE

ever get tired

of frat rock

(hootie)

whiney complaint rock

(alanis)

or perhaps even

trendy pop rock

(insert favorite

overplayed

overpayed

most over-rated

band here_____)

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Then

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This.

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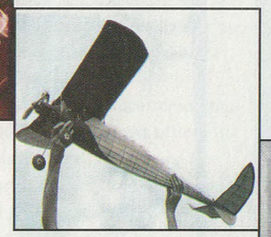
of some of this planet's

best music.



By Bruce A. Brown

www.becrecordings.com

Oh, the pressure! Last year, The Supertones carried the weight of Christian ska music on their shoulders, when they became the first band of skanktified believers to release a nationally distributed album. Now, two tours and 70-plus shows later, the O.C. (Orange County, Calif.) Supertones are back, and once again, they're blazing a trail. This time, the ska-core pioneers are the first group to release an album on BEC Recordings, the new imprint of Tooth & Nail founder Brandon Ebel. *Supertones Strike Back*, the band's sophomore disc, is getting major distribution through the gargantuan reach of the EMI Music system. Despite the fact this new deal has raised the band's commercial potential, The Supertones founder/drummer/resident evangelist Jason Carson is hoping the group will remain focused on its original goal—ministry to kids.

super tones

"I don't want this band to end some day, and all we have to show for it is a big stack of dusty CDs in our garage," insists Carson. "I want God to use us so lives can be changed and people can hear the gospel, people can come to salvation and believers can be challenged to stronger faith in the Word. To know that God could use us for something like that is incredible. Sure, the music is fun and great, but it doesn't compare to the eternal things of God."

Over the past year, the ska explosion in Christian music has seen the Supertones' popularity rise on a steady basis. But it hasn't all been kudos for the 'Tones, as ska purists often criticize them for not being "real" ska, while maintaining that bands such as The Insyderz and Five Iron Frenzy are more "authentic." It's an argument into which Carson refuses to be drawn. "Categories of music are so broad," asserts Carson. "People could just as easily say that Value Pac or MxPx aren't 'true' punk bands, because of their pop influences. We've always called ourselves 'ska-core,' just like Insyderz and Five Iron. I don't think any of us claim to be traditional bands. We all put more of an emphasis on just having a fun time and playing the music we write. Anybody can label it whatever they want."

Guitarist "Slim" Chen embellishes Carson's explanation. "I think we're all strong bands," he says. "We're not a traditional ska band, but we're definitely a true third wave ska band, with our own flavor. Insyderz are more swing/jazzy, Five Iron is more punk influenced. But that's great, because we complement each other. There's no competition."

Jason Carson says The Supertones' success has far exceeded the modest expectations the band had when originally formed six years ago, under the name Saved. "The first four years with Saved, we played shows in front of an average of probably 50 kids, if that," Carson remembers. "We can't even believe how far things have gone in the past two years. It's been a complete blessing from God. The only goal we had, even when it was just 50 people a night, was seeing kids come to Christ. At one early Saved show, there were about 40 people there and 11 kids got saved. Even then, that's what we were most committed to see happen."

Bassist Tony Terusa recalls the evolution Saved went through, as ska began to dominate their musical style. "Saved played all kinds of music. Over time, we developed the idea of the Supertones. We basically took the ska-styled songs Saved did and wrote new ska music. We added horns and a guitar about two years ago. Then we got signed and our first album came out about six months later."

Contrary to some criticism, claims Terusa, The Supertones weren't formed as a response to the rebirth of ska. "At that time, ska really wasn't very commercial. We just had some songs that were ska. They were fun, energetic and exciting. We just loved to do it. It really happened naturally. We just wanted to go for something that everybody could dance to. I think we accomplished that."

At a recent festival, the band could be found, as is often the case, milling around in baggys and T-shirts, chatting with fans, meeting other artists, and generally enjoying the atmosphere. Suddenly, when they realized they were 10 minutes away from playing, the group went into full "Supertones alert," changing into their trademark suits and shades and hitting the stage at full throttle. Terusa explains that reaction by simply saying "You just get amped up. You get excited. We pray together and hope we are leading worship when we get on stage. There's always an essence of performing, but we don't want that to overshadow the idea of us leading worship. Plus, looking out and hearing people singing along just amps you up even more."

Trumpet player Darren Mettler feels that's how the Supertones earn the right to speak into kids' lives. "We hope that creates some interest where kids will go, 'These guys are kind of cool. I might listen to what they

have to say,' when Jason or Matt speaks. We hope we deserve to be heard, that we've gained some credibility with kids. At the same time, we think the music's good enough to reach them. We try our hardest to be the best musicians we can. We've been working our tails off to make this new album."

That concerted effort certainly shows on *Supertones Strike Back*. Two and a half months in the making (their debut took about ten days), *Strike Back* is, as one might

hope, a marked improvement over its predecessor. So what's different? "Well, for one thing," quips singer Matt Morginsky, "we played in tempo and in tune on this one!" Carson feels *Strike Back* is better balanced, in terms of musical styles. "We've got harder edged songs like 'Tonight' and R&B stuff like 'Resolution.' We have these huge, big bouncy parts for concerts, and we have songs like 'Shut Up and Play,' with more of a laid-back feel. We have an instrumental song with battling horn solos and we have an acoustic praise song that Matt recorded in one take. And it's so theologically rich. If somebody picks up the album and reads through the lyrics, the message is really powerful."

Trombone player Dan Spencer adds, "We think it's full of musical and lyrical integrity. None of us here would ever mince words about saying we're about people knowing and hearing that Christ is Lord—that's what our shows are all about. But there's also a lot of people who will buy *Strike Back* who won't make it to concerts to hear Jason or Matt talk. But lyrically, they're still going to get the same challenge, hopefully in an awesome musical context, in cool songs."

Providing most of the lyrics for the songs on *Strike Back* is Matt Morginsky, who feels that, even without a lot of veiled meanings, the Supertones' songs are still very thought-provoking. "The attitude from some people is, to have deep lyrics, you have to hide your meanings everywhere, instead of just giving people a lot to think about. The way I write lyrics, I don't use a lot of metaphors. I like to just come out and say what I have to say."

"The Supertones' main message is Christ and Him crucified," Morginsky continues. "We want to help people understand certain doctrinal truths. For instance, the song 'The Grace Flood' is simply about God's grace, and how no wrong we do can outweigh the ability of the cross of Christ to atone for it. 'Unite' is more or less about putting aside all the ways we categorize ourselves, in order to be more effective as a church, because we're often so divided. Or 'Perseverance of the Saints,' which is taken from Jude 3, where it says 'Contend earnestly for the salvation already delivered to the saints.' Now, our salvation has already been given to us. But we still earnestly contend for this faith. We're going to go out every day and give it everything we've got."

Jason Carson adds that, even though the song wasn't yet being performed in concert, "Perseverance" became something of a theme for The Supertones over the last few tours. "Our challenge to the audiences this past year has been, 'Until the day you die and until the last breath you breathe, will you stand for Jesus Christ? Will you make such a deep commitment that you will not fall away? Is this your life?' We're going to try and make a video for 'Perseverance' that will provoke kids to ask themselves those questions 'Will I go all the way for the Lord? Can I give my life for Him?'"

But these lyrics aren't just convenient platitudes that The Supertones mouth from the stage. All the members of the band are involved in some sort of youth ministry at the local church level. Dan Spencer says both types of ministry are very rewarding. "It wouldn't be as fulfilling to play with the band each night and not be able to see some fruit, and have relationships with kids. I can disciple kids and offer them advice and talk about the Bible. I love being with kids and praying with them. That's what ministry is to me. But the band thing is great, because you can touch so many more people. All kids want is somebody who's gonna stand up there and be real and genuine and is going to relate to them on their level. These kids need love, they need to be shown that Christ accepts us the way we are. Jesus isn't about our behavior, or getting ourselves cleaned up before we come to Him. We simply want to tell kids, 'Come to Jesus the way you are. He'll change you.'"

The Supertones will certainly have the opportunity to reach larger audiences than ever before early next year, since the band will be undertaking a spring '98 tour with Audio Adrenaline. Jason Carson hopes the group can motivate kids who come to see them play to harness the potential of their generation. "I feel there is so much power in the youth," Carson exclaims. "Paul told Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because he was young, but to set an example for believers. On these past couple tours, we've seen so many kids with so much zeal for the Lord. We just say the name of Jesus and these kids are screaming. They're in their Bibles every day. Even kids who don't know the Lord, their whole life is nothing but potential. They have nowhere to go but forward. They have eternal life waiting for them. It's an amazing culture coming up and God loves every kid out there."

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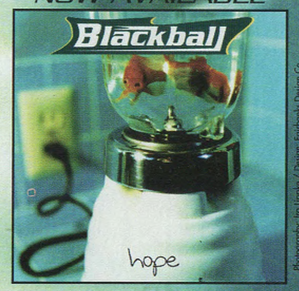

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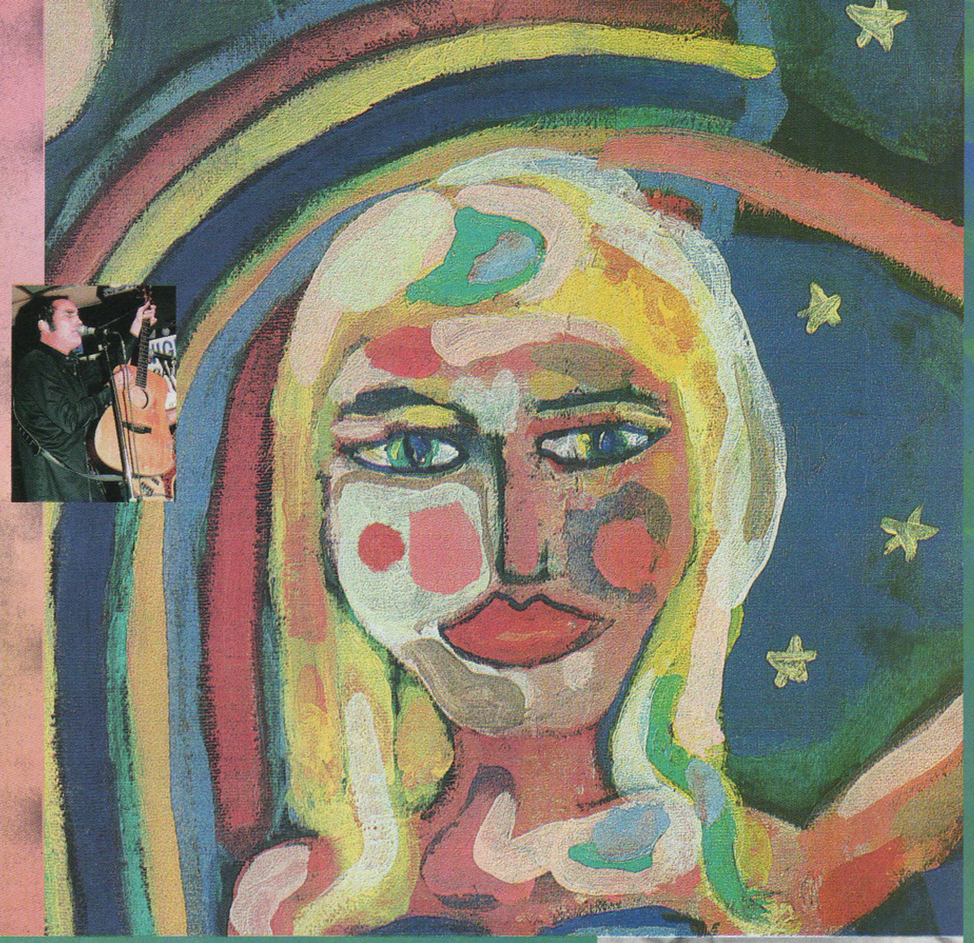


Michael Knott

Story by Jeff Elbel. Photos by Elbel. Art by Gerard.

Maverick. Controversial.

These words have been used to describe Michael Knott and his work often enough that you'd think he wore them on a sign around his neck. The truth is, for every time he has left the pundits bristling or Christian retailers wondering if they really should carry that next album, Knott has shown great sensitivity. Songs such as "Blame," from LSU's last album, *Grace Shaker* (1994) reveal a thoughtful, perceptive artist, in stark contrast to the banshee who wailed "Wino of the Red is Stained" from LSU's *The Grape Prophet* (1992).

If nothing else is revealed in Knott's music, it's his humanity. Here is a man, who for many years, has plastered the best and worst of himself all over his records. For many, he's too frank; too candid. For others, who have a difficult time identifying with the peppier, carefree side of Christian radio, Knott has become an unlikely hero.

Knott spins seedy stories of hard-luck characters in need of redemption, along with bittersweet tales of his own struggle to get unburdened of his difficulties, whether thrust upon him by others or self-inflicted. Knott gets us to think, or at the very least, to react. He may not be following the party line, but to quote 1987's seminal Lifesavers Underground album, *Shaded Pain*, "How can we be forgiven if we don't live our lives?"

Well familiar with creating appeal from outside the norm, Knott has twice brought the Christian music audience into the relatively uncharted territory of the concept album-or, as Knott jokingly prefers to call it (following Pete Townshend's lead), "rock opera."

The Grape Prophet told the story of Ellis, the head picker in Colonel Peckesen's orange groves. The album's theme had ties to Knott's own experience with the Vineyard church. 1995 finally saw the release of the long-shelved solo album, Fluid. The story detailed the final moments in the life of Jenny May in the wake of an auto accident, and the battle between Heaven and Hell for her soul. Heady (and hearty) stuff.

This year, during a break in schedule from his mainstream market band Aunt Bettys, Knott completed his third (and allegedly final) rock opera: LSU's *Dogfish Jones*. Where in the past Knott has preferred to let the music speak for itself, he thought it might be worthwhile to let the audience in on the back-story this time.

I met with Mike Knott at a restaurant in Costa Mesa, California on the day before Mike's eighth wedding anniversary to listen to a story of swashbuckling adventure upon the high seas, deserted islands, and the like. (He even told me a little about what it actually meant...)

J: If this is an opera, I should know something about the characters.

M: It consists of a sailor, a shipwreck, the sailor being swallowed by a whale, killer mermaids, a cave, a mercy maid who takes care of the sailor, a romance, a reluctant rescue and a battle with the pirates! That's the record in a nutshell.

J: It sounds like Jonah, Moby Dick, Terry and the Pirates, and the Odyssey all rolled together! Is this something you've had in mind to record, even while you were working with Aunt Bettys? Did *Dogfish Jones* start as a statement you wanted to make, or was it just a story?

M: I did want to make a statement. This is the only one of them that truly parallels my experience, I think. It's the one that I feel closest to, anyhow. I enjoyed doing the last two rock operas, and wanted to do one more.

The things that I think really mess people up are envy and strife. We all have it toward different things and different people. I wanted to do an album about the envy and strife that I feel from other people, and that I feel toward people myself. I wanted to mix it all into some kind of story.

That's where the "Green Sea Island" comes into play. The Green Sea Island is the island of envy and strife. The sailor ends up there after a shipwreck; a whale carries him to shore and spits him out. As this is happening, he's shot at by killer mermaids. They're "shooting spines at the sailor's waves, with nothing but a tale to crave."

Nonetheless, he arrives on the island, and several aspects of the theme are revealed. The sailor is angry towards people. The sailor has a "pity party..."

J: The sailor is named Dogfish Jones, I presume?

M: The idea there is that if you see other people and what they have, and you let your envy get to you, it destroys you. If you let strife from others get to you, it destroys you, as well. That's what I call the "Dogfish Jones." A dogfish is basically a shark. It eats you alive. The Jones comes in later, when you've just had too much of it.

But yes, the Dogfish Jones actually becomes part of who the sailor is, as well. He's called two different things on the record. He calls himself "Dogfish Jones," because he's going through these struggles.

There's a chorus of people that he remembers saying things to him, though. They call him "Barnacle Bob," and they keep saying, "he just can't seem to get it right."

J: He's having an identity crisis!

M: Yeah, and he just can't seem to get it right. While the sailor is heading toward the island, he keeps wanting to say, "take my reservation," in the sense that he's accepting what's happening. He's been shipwrecked, swallowed by a whale, shot at by mermaids, and he feels like he deserves this torture and ridicule; like it's a penance for something. He ends up saying later, "take my resignation." He just wants to give up dealing with how he feels, and how other people feel altogether.

After the whale spits him out, the sailor is lying on the beach dying. He calls out to God at one point. He says, "I heard it was You who could rescue hated souls." All of a sudden, a nice mermaid comes

along. She's the mercy maid, and she nurses him back to health. Then, she takes him down underneath the water and shows him the "Magical Rainbow Door," where the sailor actually starts to become free from his oppression.

So, because the mercy maid saved the sailor, she is rewarded. She becomes a woman; her tail turns into legs. That's when the sailor gives her a name, "Seashell Sally." They fall in love and start to have a life together.

After a while, though, envy and strife from the Green Sea Island begin to interfere with that life.

The story goes on from there, into a surprise twist. I alluded to what it was earlier, but I don't want to tell too much about it directly. The story takes kind of a twist, and a turn, and then... everybody dies! So, he could have just drowned when the shipwreck happened, two months ago when I started the record...

... No, just kidding! That's not what happens at all.

J: There are pirates in there somewhere.

M: Yeah, that's one of the twists, actually. You've got the basic outline of the story, though.

J: I understand that your dad plays on the record, and that he's one of the characters.

M: He's the narrator, in a sense. He does a couple of songs at particular points to help the story along. The first song he does is called "Storm at Sea;" it's like an old sea-faring folk song. It's what it sounds like on a ship, when all of the sailors are a little, uh, "weezy," and someone's singing.

J: Sometimes, with a "rock opera," you get a sense of the characters, but you have the feeling that the story is all locked up inside the artist's head. Pink Floyd's The Wall is an example of that. Do you think people are going to be able to follow your story this time?

M: This is the only record that I've ever described to anyone before I came out with it. I thought it would be fun to do that once.

J: You don't feel like you're giving it all away?

M: No, I feel like telling people what it is, this time. When I put *Fluid* out, I never said anything about it. There are people who listened to it for three years and then realized that all the songs went together! On *Grape Prophet*, I gave a little introduction to the story, which I included with the lyrics.

J: Did *Dogfish Jones* begin with a certain lyric, which suggested a story, or did you sketch out the entire story and

then start working on the individual songs?

M: I sketched out the story first. The thing is, while you're working on it, you really don't know what turn it's going to take. When I started the record, some of the songs didn't have vocal parts written for them yet. You have to figure out where a part's going to go, and what it's going to say. It's like a puzzle.

J: The LSU line-up has transmogrified over the course of several albums.

Whether people catch it in the credits or not, I actually played bass on *Dogfish Jones*. Who else is in the band this time?

M: Myself. Andrew Carter, who played electric guitar on a lot of the songs, and sang some back-up parts. A friend of mine named Chris Brigandi played guitar on some of the songs. Chuck Cummings played drums.

Photo by Jeff Elliott

J: I heard Gene Eugene (Adam Again) played keyboards.

M: Gene played the most amazing organ parts I've ever heard in my life. He made it sound like "bachelor pad" music, mixed with a soundtrack from a B-movie with Frankenstein in it. That's the kind of organ he did, and it's so cool. It makes the whole record cool. That was a lot of fun.

Also, I went wild on the vocals this time. There are ten or twelve vocal tracks on most of the songs. Some songs are minimalist, but on most of them I just went crazy. I've never done that before, where I tried multiple parts and harmonies. You can hear everything. I really like how it turned out.

J: Did Rick Rekedal play any cello on this record?

M: No. There are some really wheezy strings on my dad's songs, but those are the only strings on the record. I kind of wanted to feature the "B-Movie Bachelor Pad" organ.

J: Are you planning to play any shows for this record?

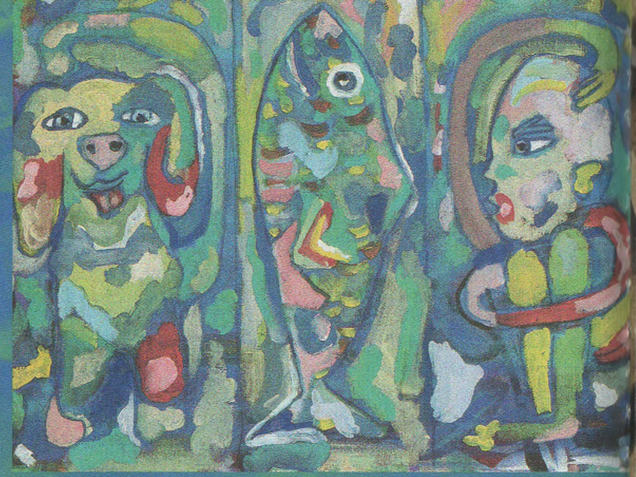
M: Any LSU shows? I don't know, our bass player's really busy. I don't know if he could make it (laughs).

Probably not. I mean, if it was the right thing, we'd do it. My main thing is the Aunt Bettys, though. Platinum Entertainment was kind enough to offer me a one-off deal for an LSU record, and I really appreciated it. I was happy to do it, and very excited to be able to do it.

When I'm between records, I hate that. I really miss it. I love being in the studio. I love writing new songs and recording them. I'm just glad I got to do that!

J: I saw you one day while you were recording. It was just you in a room by yourself, with a microphone set up in front of the mixing board. That was for one of the songs with a dozen vocal parts. I could just imagine you doing take after take after take. How do you keep from feeling like you've just been stuck in an isolation tank all week, and you need to go see the sunlight or you'll go crazy?

M: Well, what could be better than doing your art for a living? I can't think of anything. It has its highs and lows financially, of course, but I can't think of anything I'd rather do.



J: I'm sure it's tough in a situation like Aunt Bettys have. You're trying so hard to get the band on top, and everyone's got to get up at six in the morning to go pull up carpet, or haul wood, or whatever it was I heard Andrew was doing.

M: That's true, but when you've got something you love like music, you can't very well stop doing it. It's just in your bones. You can't help but do it.

Since it's my eight year wedding anniversary, I might as well tell a related story: When we were at pre-marital counseling, the pastor said, "You have to think, Mike, that maybe you need to just put down your guitar and not play music anymore. You may need to give up music if your wife asks you to."

I said to the guy, "Are you out of your mind? If she loves me, she'd never ask me to do that, first of all. Secondly, what am I supposed to do? Just not make up songs any more when I'm walking around the house? I don't need a guitar to make up a song. I just make up songs. Do I shut off my brain or something?" So, that was one of the stupidest things I've ever heard.

J: ... but not unthinkable for a non-musician to say.

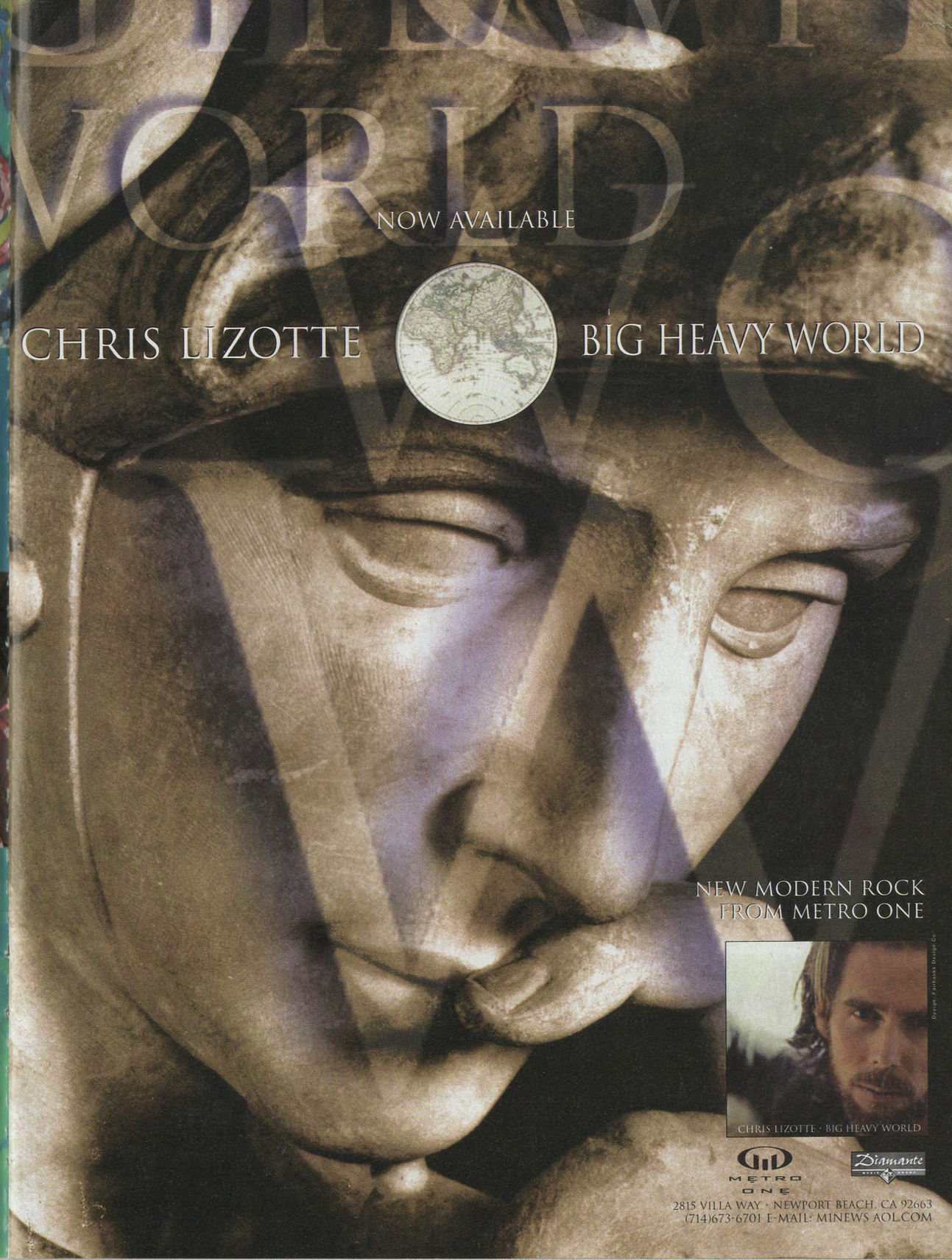
M: Oh, I know, but if music's in your bones, it's in your bones. Whether you have no guitar, or no arms, or whatever. If you're making up songs or singing a tune, how can you help but do that? That's what keeps musicians going through the good times and the mean 'n' lean times.

If it's like breathing, how are you supposed to stop? If someone could really stop doing it forever, then they shouldn't have been doing it in the first place, because it wasn't in 'em.

Truly, though, music is a part of life. It always has been, and it always will be. Thank God for it.

J: So, what will you be doing in music when you're sixty-four?

M: If I'm still alive, you mean? Probably trying to get another record deal. Doing another LSU record. Making my fifty-first concept record (laughs).



Kevin: I think it's great that *The Best of The Call* album is coming out. It should please those who have followed you since the beginning, as well as pick up a younger audience.

Been: Yeah, there's a few new songs that even those who have been fans for awhile won't know.

It makes me feel good that the music is getting another shot. Hopefully, it won't seem like a Vegas show or a cruise.

Kevin: Tell me about your upbringing. Did being raised in Oklahoma affect your music?

Been: It had a great affect on me musically, but I don't think it affected me lyrically, other than a desire to get out of there! When I would see movies that showed New York City or London or Rome, that was where I wanted to be. My father got transferred to Chicago, so we left when I was 12 or 13 years old. Because I had lived in Oklahoma, I was totally aware of southern music, like Elvis and Buddy Holly, as well as gospel and blues. Then, when we moved to Chicago, I got the urban blues influence. It affected me so strongly that I developed a deep love for music.

Kevin: Did you feel like you were making art that the industry had a hard time swallowing?

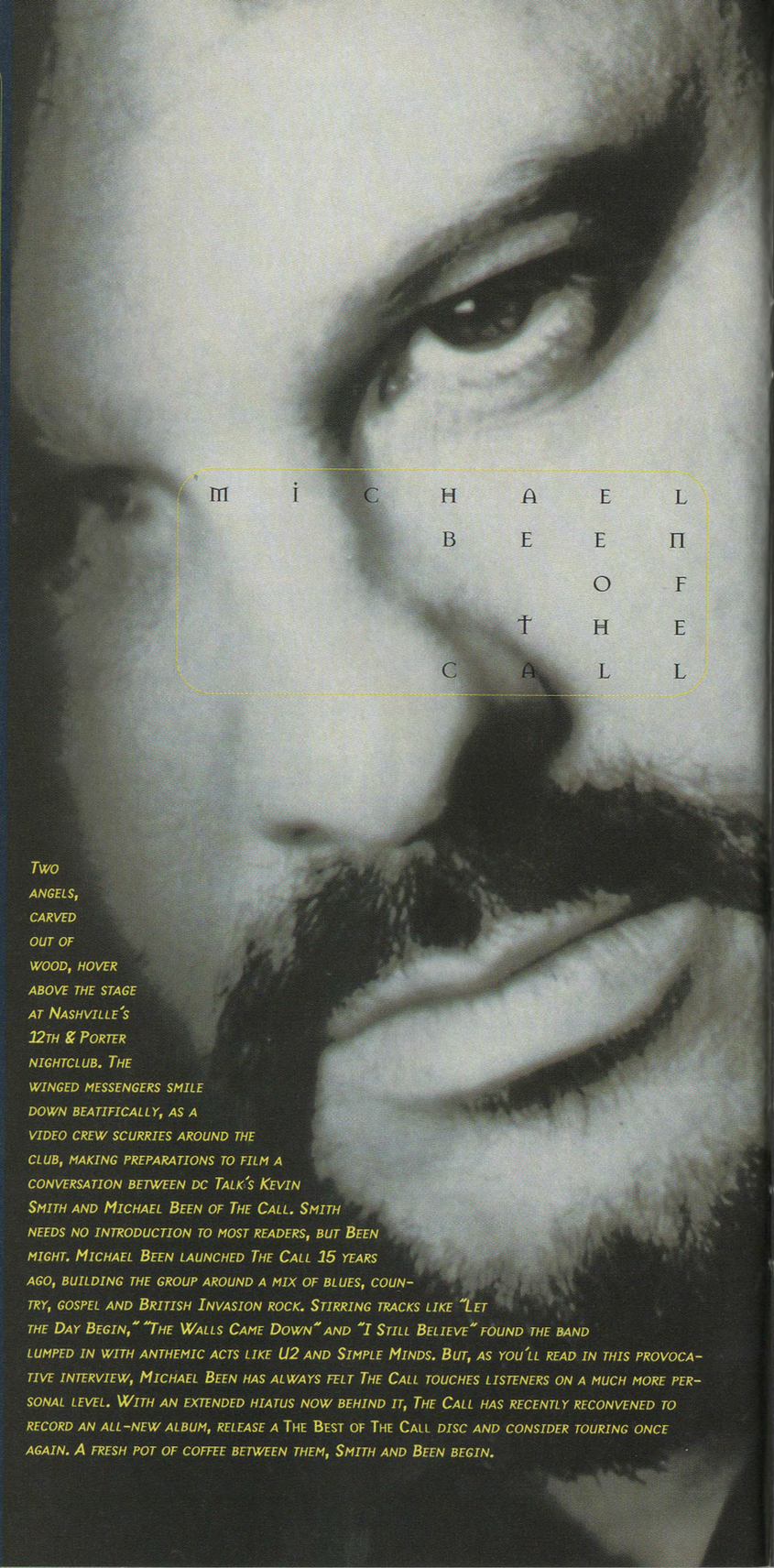
Been: Well, I started off very idealistic [laughter]. I thought I'm going to make this music absolutely from my heart and I don't care if it sells well. I didn't think art and the commercial side of music were mutually exclusive—look at The Beatles. But I had no idea the industry was as black and white as it is. It's about making money, to most of the people calling the shots. That causes people to make desperate decisions rather than heartfelt decisions. The only entertainment business I know of that's more serious is the film industry. You're talking $200,000 to make an album, versus a minimum of $2 million to do a film. Most people aren't equipped to deal with that kind of pressure.

Kevin: Do you have a message to fellow artists or people just getting entangled in the machinery of making music?

Been: Try to stay innocent, but go into it with eyes wide open. Know that you're dealing with people who are going to try and turn your heartfelt expressions into money. Try not to be offended by that. You better love this with all your heart because you're going to encounter forces that are gonna try and rip that joy right out of you. You've gotta stay focused on why you're doing it. I'm working with some bands now in San Francisco, producing and I guess you would say, mentoring them. I feel like I'm helping them avoid certain pitfalls that would derail their careers by months or even years. That's very rewarding.

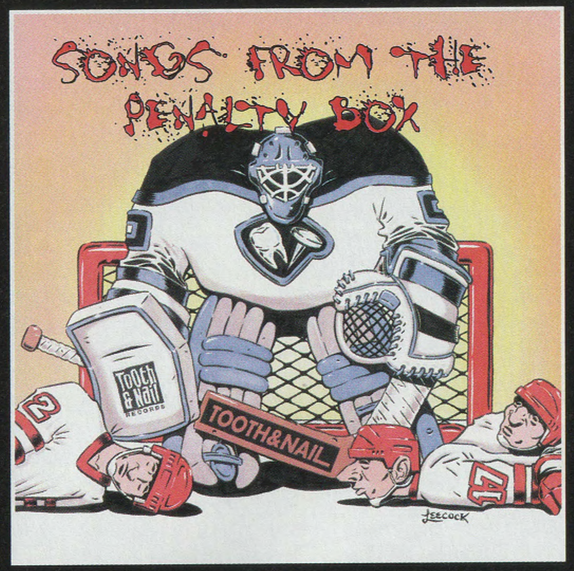
Kevin: Tell me how The Call was formed.

Been: Scott [Musick, the drummer] and I had been playing together since we were about 19 years old. By that time, we had played with about 50 other musicians in various combinations. But finding four guys who felt the same way seemed impossible. Finally, by



MICHAEL BEEN OF THE CALL

Two angels, carved out of wood, hover above the stage at Nashville's 12th & Porter nightclub. The winged messengers smile down beatifically, as a video crew scurries around the club, making preparations to film a conversation between dc Talk's Kevin Smith and Michael Been of The Call. Smith needs no introduction to most readers, but Been might. Michael Been launched The Call 15 years ago, building the group around a mix of blues, country, gospel and British Invasion rock. Stirring tracks like "Let the Day Begin," "The Walls Came Down" and "I Still Believe" found the band lumped in with anthemic acts like U2 and Simple Minds. But, as you'll read in this provocative interview, Michael Been has always felt The Call touches listeners on a much more personal level. With an extended hiatus now behind it, The Call has recently reconvened to record an all-new album, release a The Best of The Call disc and consider touring once again. A fresh pot of coffee between them, Smith and Been begin.



Featuring Songs By These Tooth & Nail Recording Artists

Stavesacre "Shiv"
taken from their second full length album "Absolutes" - TN1081

Living Sacrifice "Reject"
taken from their Tooth & Nail Records debut "Reborn" - TN1083 - SS4

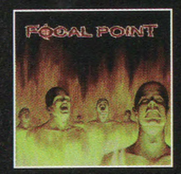
Mx Px "Doing Time"
taken from their third full length album "Life In General" - TN1060

Puller "6x6"
taken from their full length album "Sugarless" - TN1064

Strongarm "Sorrow Is A Sage"
taken from their second full length album "The Advent Of A Miracle" - TN1076 - SS1

Slick Shoes "Last"
taken from their full length album "Rusty" - TN1088

Blank "Downside"
taken from the full length album "Still Suffering" - TN1065



Focal Point "Neglected"
taken from their full length album "Suffering Of The Masses" - TN1070

The Cootees "blank"
taken from their full length album "Let's Play House" - TN1062

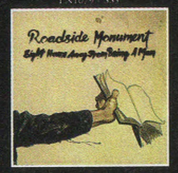
Zao "Exchange"
taken from their full length album "The Splinter Shards The Birth Of Separation" TN1079 - SS3

Upside Down Room "I Need A Thrill"
taken from their full length album "Drag Baby Drag" - TN1087

Ninety Pound Wuss "Sick & You're Wrong"
taken from their second full length album "Where Meager Die Of Self Interest" - TN1084

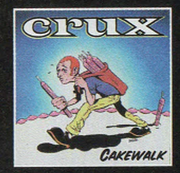
Training For Utopia "The Falling Cycle"
taken from their EP "The Falling Cycle" - TN1090-SS5

Blindside "Nerve"
taken from their full length self titled album TN1096 - SS8



Roadside Monument "SRB"
taken from their second full length album "Eight Hours Away From Being A Man" - TN1080

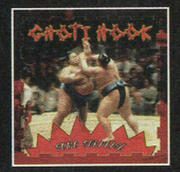
Overcome "Reconstruction"
taken from their second full length album "When Beauty Dies" - TN1077 - SS2



Crux "Paint"
taken from their second full length album "Cakewalk" - TN1082

Innermeans "Casualtyotme"
taken from their self titled EP TN1092 - SS6

Warlord "The Quest"
taken from their self titled EP TN1095 - SS7



Ghoti Hook "Seasons"
taken from their full length album "Sumo Surprise" - TN1058

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TOOTH & NAIL RECORDS

the time I was 24 or 25 years old, I decided I was going to go as a solo artist. But I ended up hiring the two guys who finally could be a band. And that became The Call. Tom [Ferrier], the guitar player, is not only technically proficient, but has a great blues background; Jim [Goodwin], the keyboard player, came out of a classical background, but at the same time, loved rock and roll piano. And Scott and I both grew up in Oklahoma, so we had everything from Motown to Elvis to Patsy Cline to the British Invasion bands to The Doors in our backgrounds. We started in California, in a town called Santa Cruz. We were definitely an odd band for that town because it's a mecca for surfers. The people lead this kind of idyllic existence, but there *we* were, writing all this dark, somber music.

Kevin: What most prompted you to want to communicate as a songwriter?

Been: Two things, really. When I was 19, I became a big fan of Bob Dylan, Van Morrison and The Band. I loved the fact that these writers could use the rock idiom I was familiar with to tell stories that were deeper than, let's go dancin', baby. The other thing was the release of Martin Scorcese's film, *Mean Streets*, and the way that film juxtaposed spiritual images with rock music. All of a sudden, the idea of a spiritual realm and the earthiness of rock 'n' roll became one thing to me. And my life turned into this struggle between the spirit and the flesh. That's why I ended up writing these songs. My intention was for The Call to do pop music, but that wasn't what came out of me.

Kevin: But in a sense, that's what attracts people to The Call. They want to hear songs about that fight in the spiritual realm.

Been: I think the conscious mind of a lot of people doesn't want music that's going to push a whole lot of emotional buttons that they don't want to deal with. But on the other hand, right below the surface, I think people are hungry for that exact thing that they're running away from. Many of our fans are people who are struggling with the fact that life has dealt them a tough blow, and they know you can't run away from it; you have to face it. Hopefully, this music helps them do that.

Kevin: In the early '80s, when The Call first developed its following, it was often mentioned with a number of bands, like Simple Minds, The Waterboys and U2, known for making this stirring, anthemic kind of music. Music that was really about truth and justice. I think that type of passionate music has kind of diminished today.

Been: Well, I'm honestly not the biggest fan of that type of music. Someone may write a song that's about the struggle of life, and it's very passionate and wonderful. But at the same time, I love an artist who can write about how in love they are. I find that to be very, very spiritual. And I don't know why, other than that it's real life.

Kevin: Tell me about "The Walls Came Down," your first well-known song.

Been: When The Call started, there were real changes going on in America. The idealism of the '60s had given way to, in my opinion, a more materialistic and militaristic state of mind. So a lot of our songs commented on those changes. "The Walls Came Down" started off as just a song about the walls between people, on a personal level, then it grew from there.

Kevin: Would you describe your writing as more introspective or intuitive?

Been: I'd even go so far as to say it's compulsive, sometimes. But I don't sit and struggle too much with the idea of a song. It seems to come out, then I'll struggle to finish it. Half of it is this wonderful inspiration and the rest of it is craft. Sitting down and doing the homework of writing the rest of a song and hopefully keeping it as inspired and relevant as when the inspiration first hit.

Kevin: Do you feel that your faith is as important in your music today as it was when you started The Call?

Been: For better or worse, I've worn my heart on my sleeve. It's been a phenomenal changing experience, a slow wearing away of ignorance. I've always looked at things a bit differently and been attracted to art that looks at things differently. When I read Scripture even, I feel like I get a different impression than most of my friends.

Kevin: To me, as Christian writers, we often fall into the trap of only writing songs about the answer, when what The Call often sings about more is the questions. It seems to me you constantly question yourself spiritually because you know you don't have all the answers.

Been: Actually, my first encounter with Christian music was when I heard that Russ Taff was going to cover "I Still Believe." What's daunting to me is that there's even a distinction between Christian rock and secular rock. If I could have a wish for Christian musicians, it would be that they write more about their lives and their personal struggles. Write about love for a man or woman; that's a very spiritual thing. Certainly, there's room for more literal, praise-oriented material, as well—but if you want to touch people outside this little circle, use your life as a parable. At the end of the story, either the listener gets it or they don't. If people get it, they'll respond on a deeper level. If they don't, you've still given them your best art.

Kevin: One of the songs on *The Best of The Call* is "We Know Too Much," a track written by the late Mark Heard. What are your impressions of working with Mark?

Been: I thought he was a wonderful songwriter. I really felt a kinship with the way he was doing it. He was one of a few guys, like Bruce Cockburn and T Bone Burnett—we were all hearing the same muse. His songs were kind of sad but funny at the same time. It seemed he saw more dark than light, and I could really identify with that.

Kevin: I've seen a lot of artists delving into spiritual darkness and glorifying evil, yet there seems to be some resistance from MTV and other broadcast media to give equal time to more positive elements. It seems like everything that is popular now has to be from the dark side. I don't see as many bands exploring spiritual goodness as I did years ago.

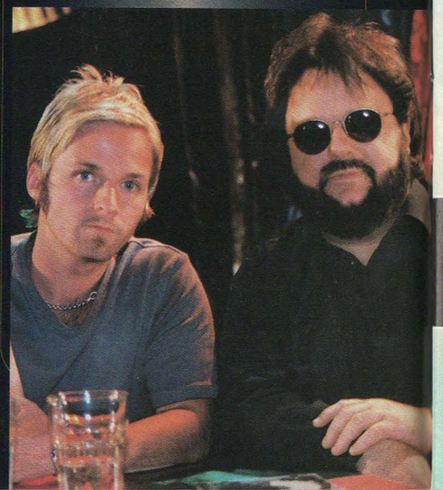
Been: The pendulum has definitely swung the other way. But I am in empathy with some of those groups that write about the dark side. Life is hard, it's tough, and some people are just not going to accept the kind of "quick fix" solution a lot of fundamentalists and ultra-simplicists try to espouse. Take Nine Inch Nails, for example. You know the reason [leader] Trent Rezner writes so intensely about the dark is because he's seen the light and it went away or he can't grab it and hold it. They're a wonderful example of the scripture *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* What they're writing about is that dark part of the journey. Sometimes a longing for the light is as crucial as being in the light. There may actually be more passion in the yearning than the having.

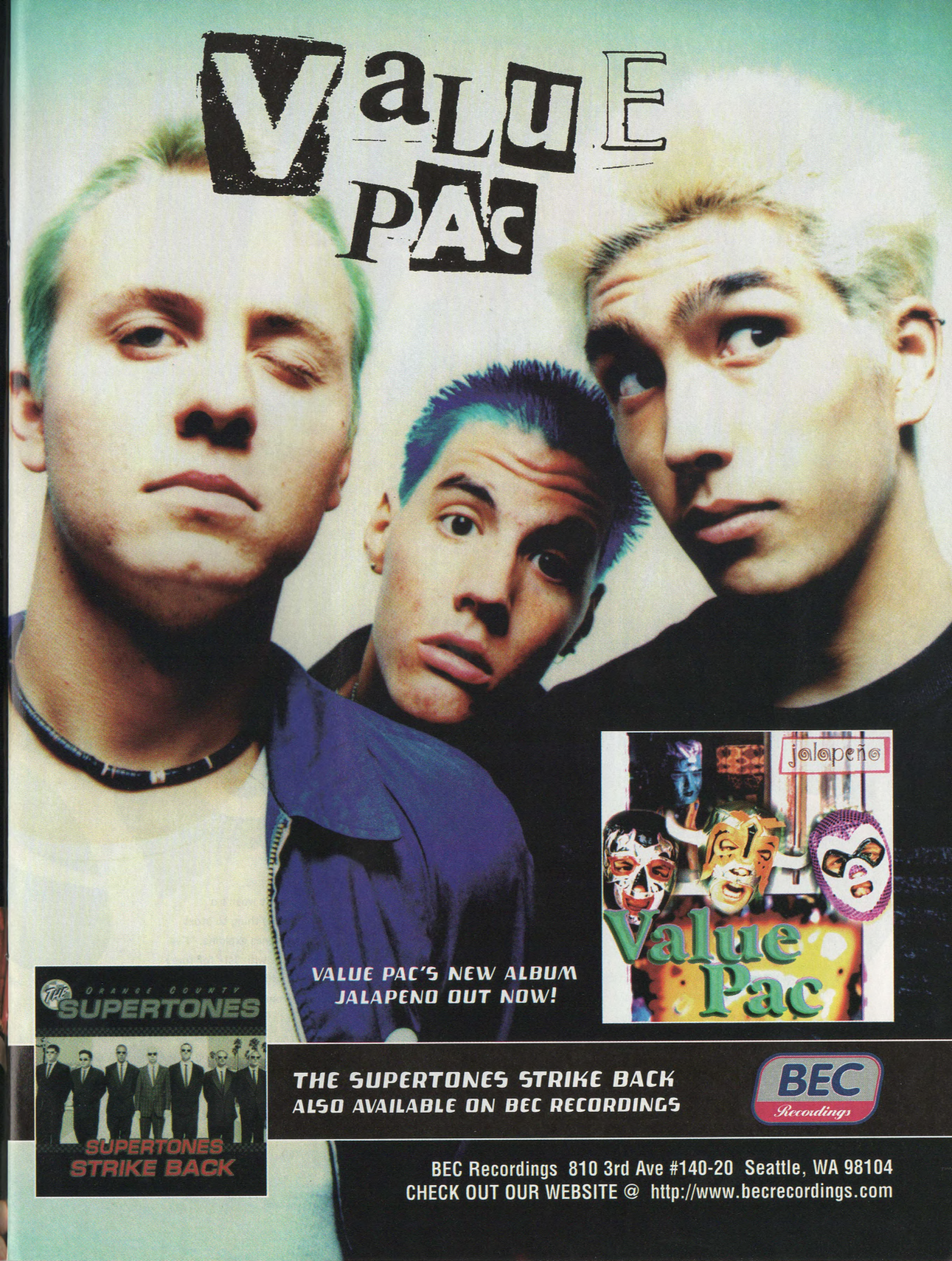
Kevin: But you have to leave room for grace.

Been: Absolutely. If there ain't grace and mercy, we're all doomed. But that feeling of doom is a valid feeling to write about.

Kevin: Do you think music is a great medium to explore things like doubt, bitterness, unbelief and sin, and be able to explain those things without them seeming too harsh?

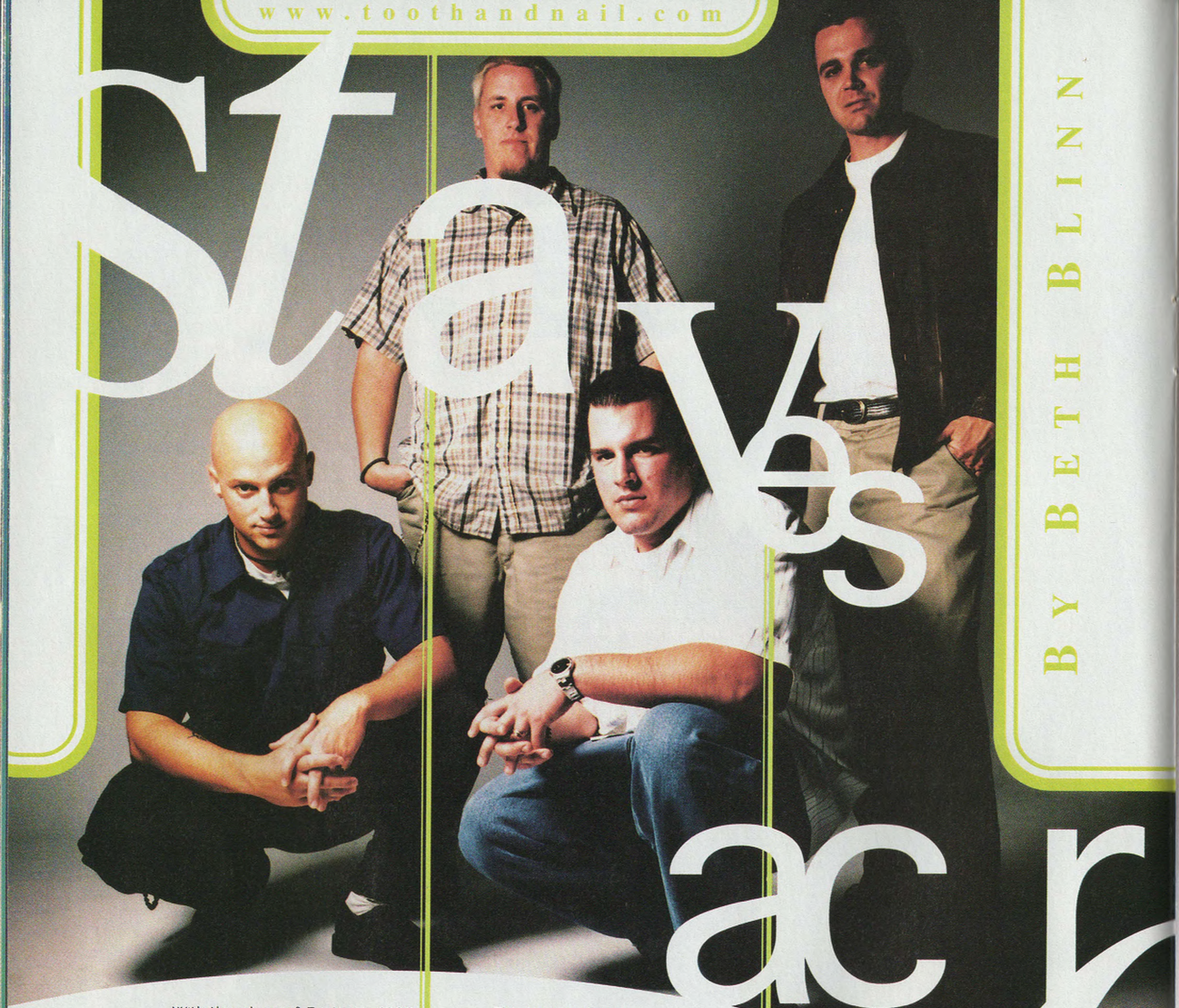
Been: It's fabulous. In fact, if you just use your music to set off the tiniest little spark in someone, then you don't have to relive the whole experience for them. We're all walking miracles, you know? It's miraculous what music can do, and I happen to think rock and roll is the best way to do it.





Staves acre

BY BETH BLINN



With the release of *Friction* in 1996, the members of **Stavesacre** captured the attention of critics and fans of intelligent, challenging rock music. Within the space of a year, the band formed, then recorded that album, garnering praise for a willingness to push the edges of the rock envelope and defy classification.

Stavesacre's second recording, *Absolutes*, confirms that the promise exhibited on *Friction* wasn't a fluke. But the problem of a group that defies classification is that, in the music business—and especially within the confines of the Christian music business—being labeled as a particular style is what it's all about.

This topic and several others were covered when I met with the members of Stavesacre prior to a recent show at Rocketown, in Franklin, Tennessee. The quartet (vocalist Mark Salomon, guitarist Jeff Bellew, bassist Dirk Lemmenes and drummer Sam West) was at the end of a five-week road trip with Tooth & Nail labelmates Puller and MxPx. Somewhat rested from a three-day break at Lemmenes' parents' home in Atlanta, the four regaled me with tales of road life and the expectations that come with being a Christian rock band.

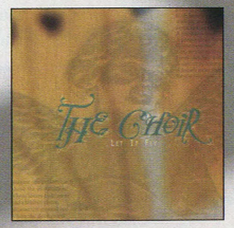
Stavesacre formed a couple of years ago in Southern California. Bellew and Salomon were formerly in The Crucified, but after the breakup of that band, the two moved back to the Southern California area, where they hooked up with Lemmenes.

"It wasn't a real serious thing to start off," Lemmenes explains. "I've been friends with Jeff for forever, and Mark and Jeff both moved from Fresno back down to Southern California. We just decided to get together. It wasn't a serious thing, we were just going to get together and play some punk songs. We realized that wasn't what we really wanted to do and we thought that we could find some cooler music. It kind of snowballed from there."

The trio added drummer Jeremy Moffett, signed with Tooth & Nail and released *Friction*. Moffett eventually left the band and

However, once again, we got swept in every single choral category.

1996 Dove Award for "Best Alternative Rock" Record Of The Year



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was replaced by West. "They called me after they ran into a mutual friend of ours in Texas," explains West. "They asked about me and I was looking for something. I auditioned for them and here I am. It was sort of an answer to prayer. I hadn't heard them before they called me. I had heard of them, but I hadn't heard any of the music."

When the band went back to the studio to work on what would become *Absolutes*, they ended up creating a work that, on the whole, they felt was more balanced that *Friction*. "In some ways, it's darker," Salomon says. "I think in some ways, in the light places, it's lighter. It's more focused, the music's a lot more balanced. On the first album, there were a couple of songs that were really extreme. This one has a little more of everything on it."

The difficulty of being diverse is that, ultimately, someone is going to try to label what you do. Stavesacre has had its share of frustration in that area.

"When you leave something up to someone else's interpretation, you hope that they'll respect that and not try to define you," Salomon comments. "I don't like being called a hard core band. I don't think we're at all a hard core band."

"People are so quick to pigeonhole," adds Lemmenes. *You have to fit into some category ...otherwise, how am I going to describe you in my review?*

As a creative entity, Stavesacre's music is truly a group effort. "We all come with ideas," explains Salomon. "Jeff usually starts most of the songs with guitar. Dirk has bass lines he'll come up with. But, from what I remember, the first song that we wrote together [for this record], Sam started it off with a drumbeat."

"The lyrics usually come last," he continues. "Jeff wrote some on the new album, and I wrote some. Everything goes through the 'filter' of each other. If there's something that some of us really don't like at all, we'll try to adjust it before we move on."

The lyrical focus on *Absolutes* is a direct reflection of the band members' life experiences. Salomon says, "Lyrically, it was kind of a harder time. A lot of it had to do with the time of year, a lot had to do with the pace that we were writing the songs. I can't write about stuff that's not personal. I try not to speak for anybody else. I was just going through some things. I wrote about not just those specific things, but the way they affected other aspects of my life."

Life on the road is not alien to these guys—they spent the majority of last year touring in some fashion. For the most part, their five-week outing with MxPx and Puller was positive, with a few horror stories, not the least of which was an equipment problem.

"We brought our own P.A. with us on this tour," says Lemmenes. "It lasted three shows and exploded and we had to send it back. Then we had two shows with no merchandise—that was bad."

"There's the time we were driving back from West Palm Beach, and I ran a red light in front of five cops," West laughs.

"That wasn't a horror story, that was funny as heck," Bellew shoots back.

"They [the police] were pulled off the road, all their lights were flashing and they had some guys standing by their car, West explains. "I was looking at them and then looked up and saw 'Red Light!' I tried to stop, couldn't stop and went right through the intersection. Every cop that was out of his car was looking right at me. But they were too busy with whatever they were doing to come after me."

While this quartet has its lighter moments, things get serious when the topic turns to artistry and the expectations put on Christian musicians to do more than play music.

"There's the debate back and forth—although for us it's pretty much done—regarding preaching at concerts," Salomon states. "We're confident—through studying the Word, through experience and through the encouragement of people like my pastor and other pastors—that when God tells us to preach, we preach, and when He doesn't, we don't. You don't talk about the gospel just because there's going to be 50 kids out in the audience who are going to be mad at you and talk badly about you on the Internet if you don't. You don't present the Gospel in that way."

"There will be some kid [yelling] *Preach Jesus!*" he continues, "and if you don't, it instantly enters a whole new arena. They assume that you're afraid of the Gospel or something like that."

"That you're trying to hide it," adds Lemmenes.

"You don't have to pay ten bucks at church to hear the Gospel preached," points out West.

"You've got these promoters who charge 12 bucks a show and then they're mad that we didn't preach, and I don't get it. It's almost like they're not really concerned about the Gospel going out and the actual conversion of people to Christianity and being freed from the bondage of sin, as they are about not having Christians come down on them," Salomon says.

"Our experience has been that talking to people on a one-on-one basis has been more productive," he continues. "I've had three or four conversations on this tour that I know ended in either a person legitimately giving their life to Christ, or in a really open and productive discussion. To me, that showed the

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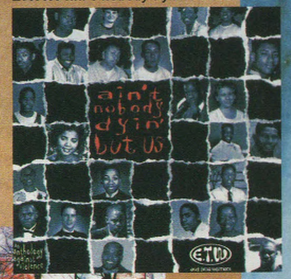

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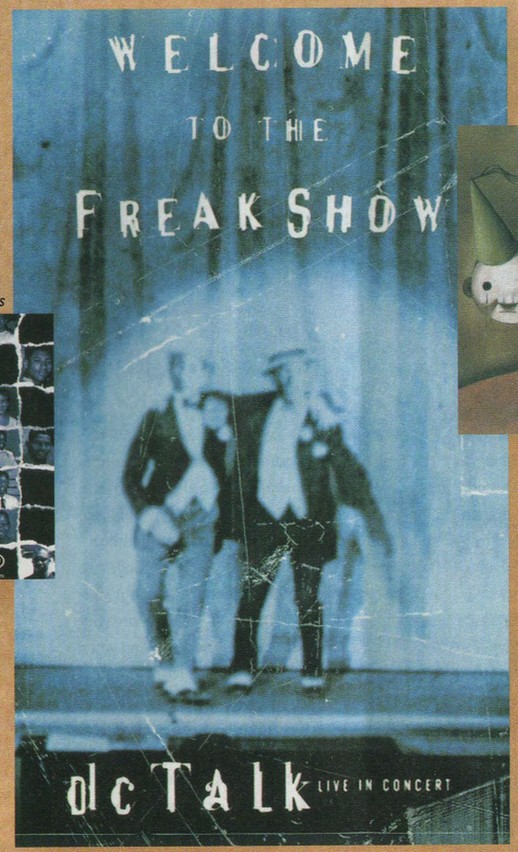

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Gospel for what it really is—practical, real life. And transcending past that, to where people can see you and they can observe you hanging out for an hour or two after the show, and they can see that you're actually living what you're preaching about. I can't tell you how many times that bands I've met, or even myself, have preached the gospel from the stage, and all the Christians are happy, we get the gold star, and then the life outside of the concert is nowhere near that."

Bellew says, "It's like Mark said--the people who brought us in don't care as much about the preaching of the Gospel as they care about the kids not coming down on them. The kids don't care as much, in my opinion—I'm sure there are one or two who legitimately care about people getting saved—but most of the time they just want to be justified for going to a rock show. Because their whole life they've been told that rock is bad, but then when they got saved, someone's said 'Well, here's "fill-in-the-blank-of-your-favorite-alternative-band," but these guys are Christians, so it's okay.' So they have to be justified--it's like 'Make me feel okay for having a good time at a rock show.' And my response to that is 'No. There's nothing wrong with going to a rock show.'"

"He's right," adds Salomon. "or [it's about] their parents,even. On a more simple level, *It's going to be OK, Mom, they're going to preach.* They want to have the justification."

"And so, those times we don't preach, kids often yell T-shirt slogans, just to make themselves feel better. That's trivializing [the Gospel]," Bellew states emphatically.

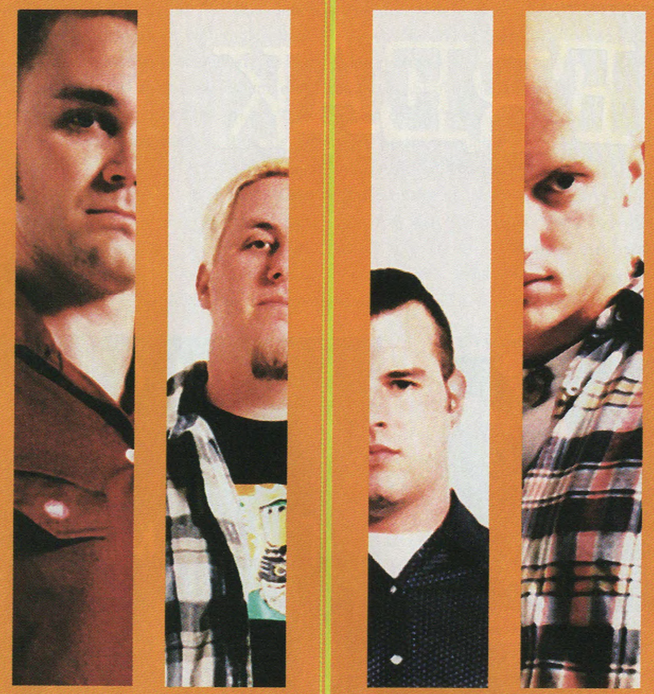
"A lot of shows on this tour have been in the clubs, which has been great," Salomon says. "You know, you'll get kids who spit on you, you'll get kids who curse you out from the crowd, but I would much rather have that response than all of the kids cheering when you mention Christ as a token. I know there are going to be people who, when they read this, are going to go to the farthest extreme possible and say *See, I knew it. Those Stavesacre guys, they're telling people not to preach. It's a big scandal.* And it's not. That's what the second to the last cut on the album is about. People coming down on you with these suppositions about how they believe Christianity is supposed to be presented and why it is that way, and how we sometimes don't fulfill their expectations. And all of a sudden you're not a Christian, you're an enemy."

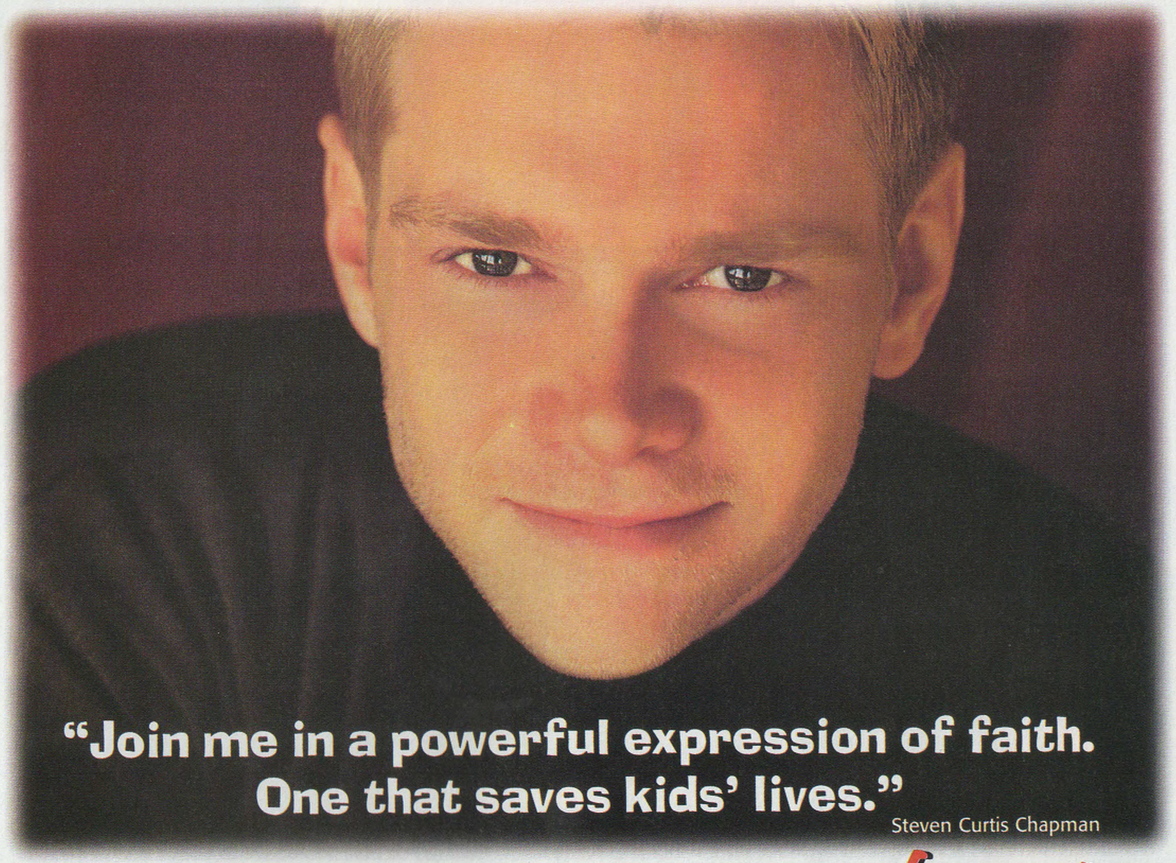
"And all of that, aside from the technicalities, is just not showing love," he says. "That's the highest commandment—*Love your neighbor as yourself.* Besides loving the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul and mind, you're supposed to love your neighbor. When it comes to interaction, the ten commandments are essentially two different things. The first four are about your conduct towards your God, the other six are your conduct towards your fellow man. And when Jesus summed them up, what is the greatest commandment, he was breaking the ten commandments down to two parts. But we have not done that. We're not going about Christianity on a day-to-day, practical basis. Displaying love in our actions—it just doesn't happen."

"We feel that our biggest influences are with the people that we work closest with, like the guy who does our videos, just people we come in contact with," Lemmenes adds. "You can be so much more effective with the people that you actually have a dialogue with, versus someone you are staring at from the stage."

"There's also the other extreme that says don't ever preach at concerts—we're not saying that either," Bellew points out. "We were just discussing this, because we're talking about going on the road with The Supertones in the fall. They preach at every show. I hope that the Supertones, at every show, are going to preach out of the integrity of their relationship with God, and that, out of that, people see the genuineness of their faith. We're not saying, *Don't preach.* It's just that we're not preachers. We believe that you pay 12 bucks, you should get your money's worth, and you should be sweaty at the end of the show."

"When all we're doing is saying our Lord's name, or mentioning him just because other Christians expect us to, we've reduced our faith to the lowest common denominator," Lemmenes says. " If the Lord is not telling us to [preach], we're not going to. We're just going to do what we came to do—a rock 'n' roll show. "And if the Lord puts it on our heart to say something, we will. God's definitely blessed us with this ability. Hopefully, in our actions and while we play, that will have an effect on someone too."





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On the stage of Nashville's 328 Performance Hall, several modern rock bands are walking the fine line between making or breaking their careers, in a yearly ritual known as a Gospel Music Association week showcase. Next to me, Dime Store Prophets' bassist Sam Hernandez, takes on the role of concert reviewer. As he contemplates, he says, "I hope you don't think I'm too critical, but..." Then he proceeds to dissect band after band, knowing his own group will probably be subject to the same scrutiny when it takes the stage the following night.

As we meet for lunch the following afternoon, Hernandez and the rest of DSP—guitarist Masaki, drummer Joel "Bone Crusher" Metzler and lead singer Justin Stevens—tackle subjects ranging from the imminent release of the band's sophomore album, *Fantastic Distraction*, to its reluctant attendance of GMA Week activities, to that most inevitable topic of conversation, vintage Warner Brothers cartoons.

"The original Michigan J. Frog cartoon is a classic," asserts Masaki, co-founder of DSP and apparently the group's resident sage. "Good choice of songs, very well performed. Emotionally, there's the peak point, where he does the flip on the trapeze. That's your payoff."

Singing frogs aside, it's been a busy year since the release of the Prophets' first album, *Love is Against the Grain*— a year

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heavy lifting dime store prophets

By David Bumgarner

American Standard

Every Day Life

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While many artists would be content with the level of success DIME STORE PROPHETS has achieved, this band has a clear desire for something beyond hits.

that's seen the band open for acts as diverse as '80s punk queen Joan Jett and Christian alternative supergroup Lost Dogs. According to Masaki, it's been a year of seasoning. "The difference between the two albums is that this one is good," he jokes. "*Fantastic Distraction* was written in a much shorter period of time. I think we have developed more chemistry. Joel didn't play on the first album; that's made a big difference in our dynamics. We recorded all these songs within a set block of time, whereas the first album was a compilation of things we had done over two and a half years. This one is a year in the life of Dime Store Prophets."

Stevens concurs. "This was a very focused project. It was actually fun to have deadlines. I can't get anything done if I don't have deadlines!"

With the assistance of Vigilantes of Love's Bill Mallonee, the band began rehearsing new material early this year. Mallonee then handed the ball to accomplished producer John Keane (10,000 Maniacs, R.E.M.). Metzler admits the potential for tension could have been high. "We were nervous about working with John at first, but he ended up being very easy to work with." Although DSP enjoyed its studio time with both Keane and Mallonee, scheduling conflicts prevented the two from completing the album, and the bulk of the production was done by Masaki.

Though he was quite critical at the previous evening's showcase, Hernandez now seems a bit more down to earth about the state of music as art. "One of our new songs, 'Yeah, Sure, OK, Monet,' is about rip-offs. It's about an artist who is having a hard time trying to come up with anything original, which is where we were at the beginning of this project. It's a monologue from God to the artist saying, *The only things original in this world are the things which I've created.* The artist learns that the most original he can possibly be is to recognize God revealing Himself through his art. Of course, the music, melody line and lyrics to that song are all rip-offs!"

As Masaki's thoughts turn to the parade of glitz surrounding GMA Week, he sidesteps the hype and searches for the substance. "It's difficult for an artist to watch their art become exploited. I'd like to think that we're a band that doesn't place value on our art. It's just what we do. We get together and hash out songs we like. GMA is good for retailers, record labels, distributors and radio because it's their means of survival. But from an artists' standpoint, it's pretty much exploitation."

Stevens adds a different slant. "A lot of people seem critical of GMA. It gets real scary when we try and figure out what God looks like in other people. I think it's pretty necessary to see what God looks like through us first."

While many Christian bands would be content with the level of success Dime Store Prophets has already achieved, there's a clear desire in this band for something beyond hits. Hernandez explains, "There's a number of Christian bands that are more introspective rather than ministry-oriented. And these bands are the same ones who want to do things in both the Christian and mainstream market. We're that way. We'd like to do something in the general market."

But is the music good enough? While fans will always debate that question, Masaki offers some helpful advice about getting it there. "If some Christian bands tried to step outside this market, they couldn't do it. Sales of 30,000 copies is considered successful for a Christian group. Well, a 30,000 unit record in the general market is a failure, even with most 'indie' bands. In that respect, I'm grateful for the security the Christian market has to offer. But many artists struggle for acceptance in the Christian market alone, without setting their goals on the music market at large. We're different. We don't necessarily write songs just to encourage the Body. We write songs that will hopefully make everyone think. For us, it's important just to be accepted, period."

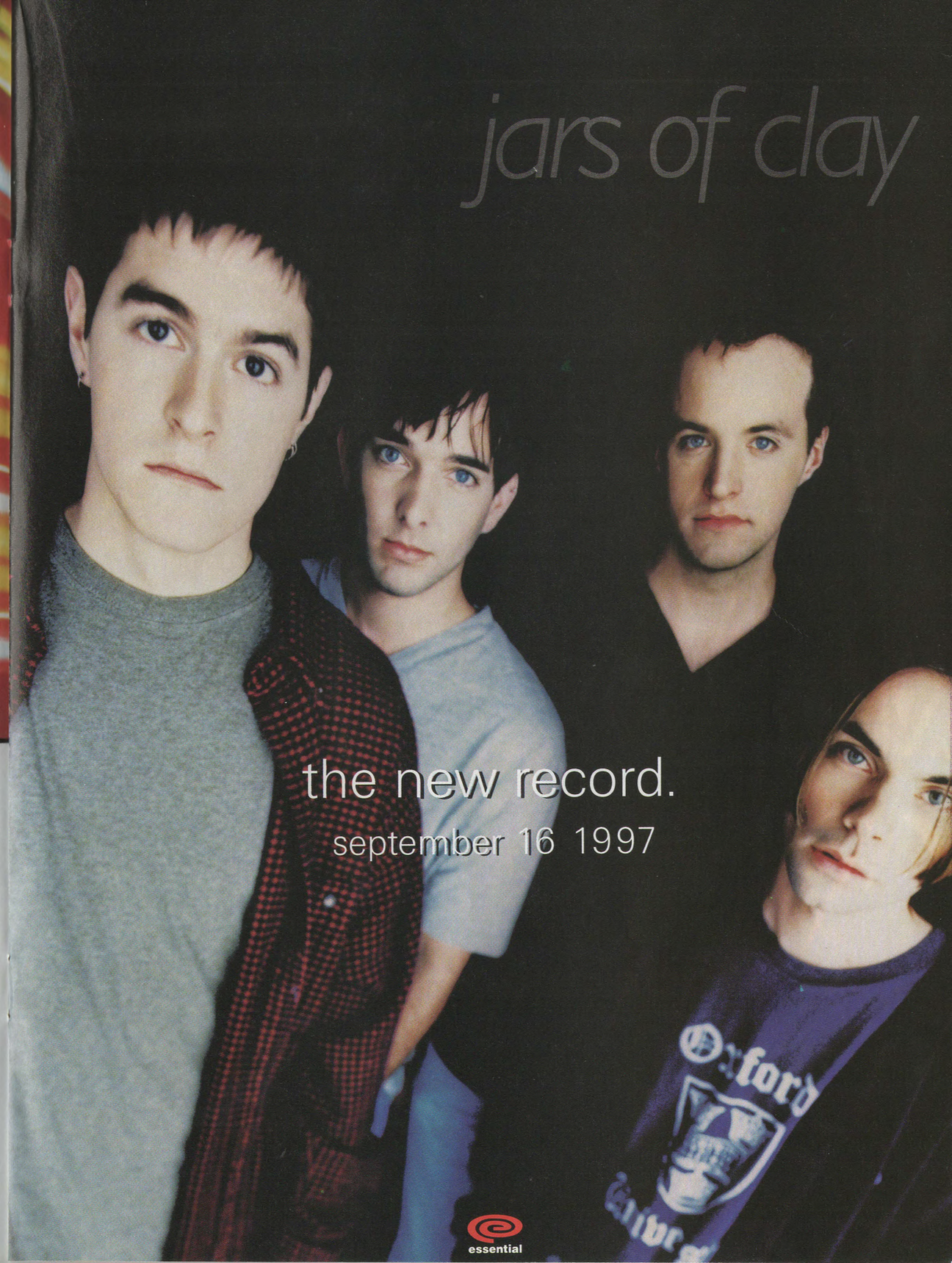
The Prophets are taking the logical step toward that acceptance—going on the road full time. But Masaki is skeptical of glamorizing a full-time musical career.

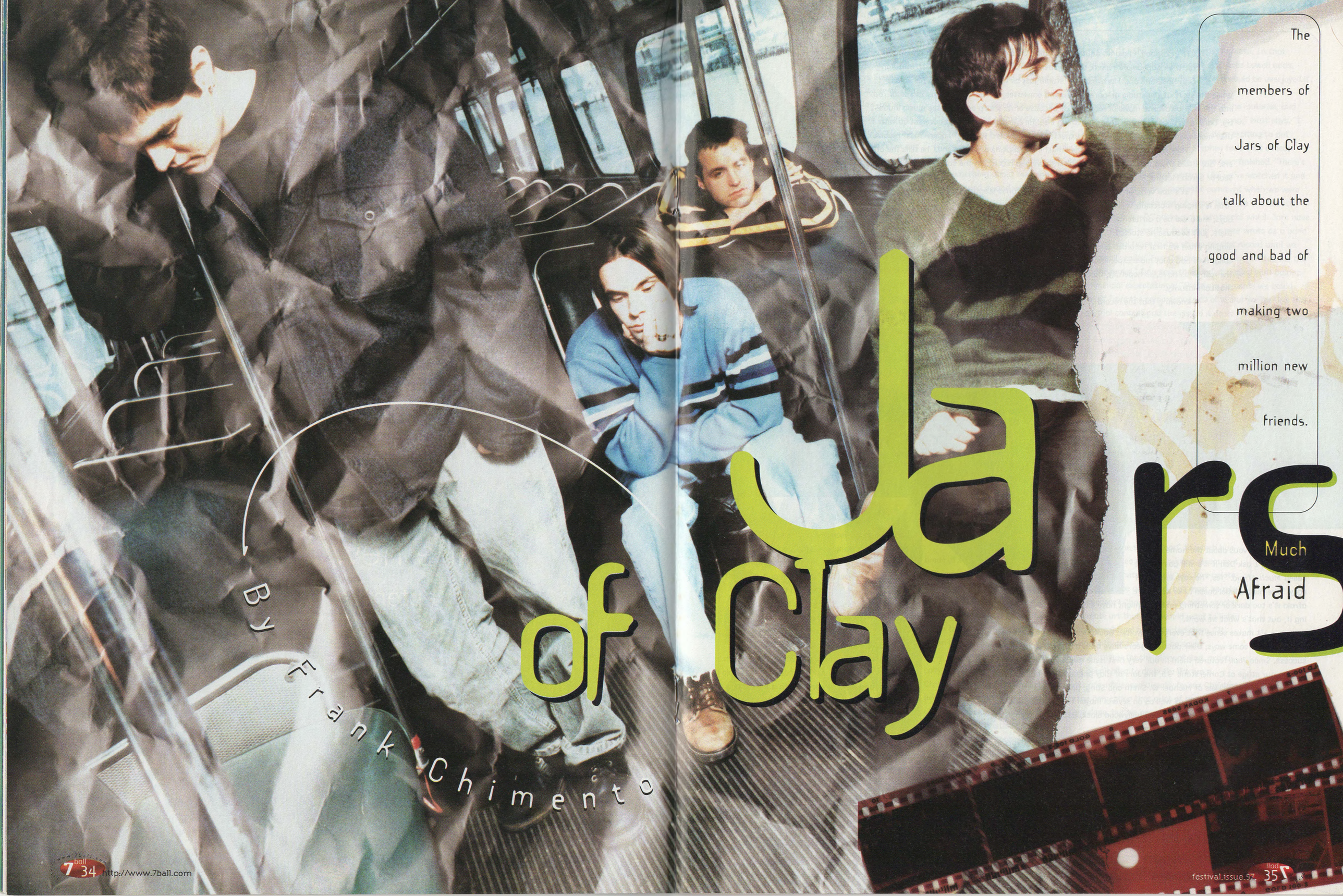
"The more we approach doing music full time, the uglier it looks to me. The things that are involved with being a musician full time are not necessarily what I would consider ideal. It's like trying to merge Disneyland with reality, which is a struggle for a lot of people."

Regardless of their misgivings, Dime Store Prophets is eager to take *Fantastic Distraction* on the road. Only one step remains before that can happen. "We're really looking forward to learning the studio musicians' parts," Masaki deadpans. "We still have to make charts for Sam!"

"We're basically just pretty faces," Stevens adds, with a grin.

With a combination of keen insight and sharp humor, the Prophets are a walking paradox. Although they consider GMA Week as a sort of necessary evil, this evening, they are playing a showcase as part of that very same event. They claim good art is not necessarily the end-all objective for their music, yet hold high standards not only for the music they make, but the music to which they listen. Perhaps aware of these contradictions, Masaki and Hernandez both cite "Heavy As It Goes," the closing track on *Fantastic Distraction*, as their favorite. The Prophets are on a search for their place in music, armed with the confidence of Stevens' lyric, *Heavy as it goes/I am Yours tonight/That's all I know.*





Jars of Clay

The members of Jars of Clay talk about the good and bad of making two million new friends.

Much Afraid

By Frank Chimento

We're in London, England. Aquarium Studios. Jars of Clay is working on final mixes for their sophomore record, due on shelves in September. Lead vocalist/frontman Dan Haseltine and I arrive at the studio just as the band is breaking for lunch. While the staff at the studio prepares steak and omelettes, someone pops *This Is Spinal Tap* into the VCR-a favorite movie of most bands because of its sharp satire of the music industry. Dan, however, has his mind on something else: He's just had a phone conversation with their management company, which still expects the new record to be a "modern rock" record.

"They keep asking if it's like the Smashing Pumpkins or something," he tells the others. "So, I told them again, 'NO! It is an alternative pop record,' in the same vein as Sting or Seal or Sarah McLaughlin."

"It's still very, very acoustic based," lead guitarist Stephen Mason tells me. "Dan is singing incredibly well these days; there will be a difference there, just because he started singing when we first recorded our first song. He's had a lot more experience under his belt, as the rest of us have, so hopefully, there's a noticeable, musical maturity."

Knowing that the record company is nervous about the name of the new record, I ask Dan if it's still going to be called *Much Afraid*. "Yes," he says emphatically. "The record label doesn't like it. They're afraid it's too dark or something and they might have trouble marketing it, but that's what we want."

It makes sense that everyone involved would be feeling the pressure about now. In some ways, their past two years have been a blur of Cinderella success. Since *7ball* featured them in our very first issue and we picked them to play on our stage at Cornerstone '95, the Jars of Clay phenomenon has found them opening for the likes of Michael W. Smith and Sting, playing both mainstream and Christian festivals, as well as on several major TV programs and recording one song each for two big-deal Hollywood blockbusters and a jingle or two for Coca-Cola.

What amazes me is how humble they remain: The members of Jars of Clay are as down-to-earth as ever. They work very hard to maintain ties with family and friends, and they go to great lengths to stay in touch with their fans. They don't want any of this to go to their heads.

Still, they keep a pretty hectic schedule, which might explain why, although we all live in the same city-Music City, USA-I had to sweat through getting a passport, and flying several time zones across the ocean (in the largest plane I've ever seen) just to catch up with them.

www.jarsofclay.com

After lunch, we discover that producer Steve Lipson and engineer Heff Moraes were busy putting the final touches on "Overjoyed." As we listen, I'm noticing how fantastic Dan's vocals sound when guitarist Matt Odmark jokes, "More mojo on the vocals, please!" The rest of the guys laugh (must be some sort of inside joke).

The producer has worked with the likes of Annie Lennox, Sophie B. Hawkins, Simple Minds and even Cher. In a thick British accent Lipson tells me, "I produce a lot of solo artists and haven't worked with a band since Simple Minds. But, when I heard these demos, I flipped my lid. This is incredible music."

When I compliment Dan on how well he sounds, he seems humbled by the comment, and breathes easier (as if his body language was screaming, *Thank you and you have no idea how hard I've worked at singing better*). I also noticed how good the harmonies sounded. Based on this song, Dan is right, it does remind me of Sting, but not in a rip-off sort of way. Just the style, mood and the quality of the sound.

"We're all real excited about the record," Dan says. "We're in this place of not knowing how people are going to react to it. We're at a real apprehensive point."

The rest of the band also owns up to worrying about how the album will be received, both critically and commercially. "However many we sell," says Stephen, "we feel like we've made the best follow-up we could have dreamed of. Just the opportunity to do another album and record with a great producer has been worth it." Matt, however, is more specific in his concerns. "You can't really say that if we released the record tomorrow and it sold 100 copies and that was it, we wouldn't be disappointed. I really hope people like it as much as, if not more than, the last record. It's the record we wanted to make. In that sense, I think we feel a bit successful already." To which keyboardist Charlie Lowell adds, with a grin, "And I'd like to sell at least 6, 7, 8 million records. I think I would be overjoyed if we did that."

Given the expectations, I ask the band if they're confident in the material, and what some of their favorite tracks are. "I'm at a loss to name any one song," Matt says. "I really like 'Much Afraid,' 'Portrait Of An Apology' and 'Frail.' But it's been exciting to put together a record where I really believe in all 12 of the songs." Stephen feels that at least one of the tracks, "Overjoyed," took on a life of its own, before it was even finished. "There's something about the song that almost feels like we didn't write it. Like we've watched it and recorded it, and watched it come into being. A producer made the comment when we were close to being finished with that song that, if he could write a song, that was the kind of song he would want to write. Which was an honor." Charlie picks two tracks which Jars have been working with for some time: "'Fade To Gray' was the first song we ever wrote as a band and it appeared on our demo. We did it several times in the studio for this record until we were happy with it. And 'The Wish,' originally called 'Five Candles,' which was written for the movie *Liar, Liar*, and didn't make it in the movie." Dan says the band struggled with balancing topics it wanted to cover and commercial expectations. "There are elements we could have done better at sealing ourselves off from the commercial side of it. But we feel like this album far exceeds the first in the spiritual content and the issues it deals with," he says.

Many fans will note that the album title, *Much Afraid*, is the name of one of the main characters in Hannah Hurnard's classic book, *Hind's Feet On High Places*. Dan confirms that novel was, in fact, the inspiration for much of the album. "Her book is an allegory of the journey from fear to faith," Dan explains. "Of moving from a place where we're motivated by our fears to being motivated by God's love for us. In the past year, that's a place where most of us have been." Stephen says the album encourages listeners to confront those things of which they're most unsure. "Hopefully we show how the Gospel can be relevant in those places as well. We pray there's an underlying message of hope throughout the record that can also be caught and understood by non-Christians."

Apparently there was something about the song "Flood" to which hundreds of thousands of radio listeners and music video viewers related, because it received a ton of airplay this past year, in both formats. So, how will Jars create an album that must be embraced by Christians to be accepted, but must be relevant to non-believers to be a commercial success? Charlie says the band shoots for both: On the one hand, they want to create art that they would want to listen to; on the other, they want it to reflect how the Gospel has affected them. "It doesn't make much sense to talk about one without the other," he says.

Stephen chimes in agreement. "All things for the glory of God, artistically and spiritually. I think that we have been called to do both. We are a Christian band in that the songs we write are influenced directly by our Christian beliefs. The tough thing is getting past the perception that a lot of people have of Christian music. We want to push the envelope, but we are in no way embarrassed by our Christianity."

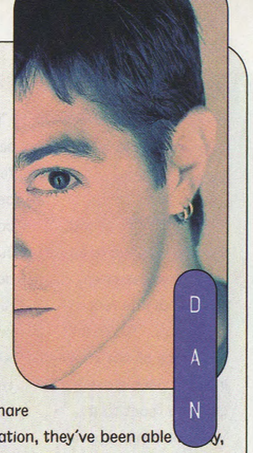
Charlie continues, "To be real specific, 'Overjoyed,' 'Much Afraid' and a hymn we wrote, called 'Him,' are pretty much explicit songs speaking about relationships with Christ that I don't think could be misunderstood for a human relationship. Then there are songs about the different things we struggle with day in and day out."

"And then there are other songs, too," Matt adds, "which deal very specifically with relationships and do not address themselves to God or to Christ. 'Crazy Times' is similar to 'Flood,' in that it talks of our basic need as humans. I

think that's a song that can invite a non-Christian to really consider Christianity as a place to come *as is.*" It's also similar to "Flood" in that it's a song that stands out and rocks.

Over the past two years, Jars of Clay has had opportunities that few Christian artists have had, to take its music before thousands, sometimes millions, of non-believers. How does the band feel it has responded to that challenge? "We understand our call to be witnesses of Christ through our actions, through our concerts, through our interactions with people, just through life in general," Matt says. "In our concerts we try really hard to let the music speak, but hopefully in a way that's clear. We do understand at the same time that ultimately winning souls is the Lord's job. And we understand our responsibility on stage, as anywhere else, is to be witnesses of who we understand Christ to be and what He's done and hopefully to live in a way that reflects that."

"Thank the Lord, He uses us in different ways to reach different kinds of people," Charlie continues. "We really feel confident that this is the way, at least for right now, that the Lord has chosen to use us. We pray that we will be obedient in our actions and in our art and to the ways He wants to use us."



Stephen adds that, "People come up to us at shows and share that, you know, because our record's on such and such a station, they've been able to say, *Hey, have you heard that song by Jars of Clay?* It's been awesome to see how kids have been able to use that to minister to their friends who don't know the Lord."

The virtual overnight success Jars of Clay experienced came with its share of pressures, both in how the band related to each other and its peers. Charlie says there were times their accomplishments made them feel a little guilty. "When we see bands that have been around for years like King's X, who we really look up to, and they don't really have a lot to show for their hard work, there is a tendency to feel kind of weird and a little bit guilty. But then again, we can't really take credit for anything that has happened in the last couple of years. We definitely attribute it to the grace of God. We can be grateful we haven't had eight years of playing in bars."

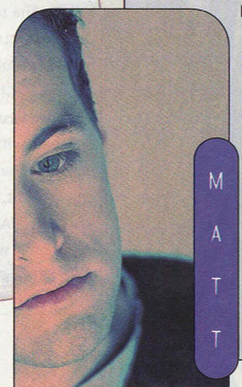
Dan says another surprise result of Jars' success was "thinking you're more than a normal person. I started to distrust people. I stopped being able to relate to people because I thought they wanted something from me," he recalls. "You become real distant, and then it filters down into even those friendships you have that are real. It took me a while to handle that aspect of that fame. Even now I still struggle with it."

The band grew so big so quickly, it robbed them of the chance to grow before they were famous. Stephen says that put a serious strain on their relationships. "Being put out on the road forced us to get to know each other better than I think we really would have cared to. It's no mystery the deeper that you go into a relationship, the more dirt comes to the surface. We had some unpleasant times, but through that, well, it was one of the first times that I experienced true grace and a friendship that went beyond hanging together. It called me into accountability. God was faithful to strip us of our pride. We're thankful, because we are that much tighter as a result, and more in tune to how each of us feels."

Even as Jars became better friends, the band faced criticism that it frankly wasn't a very good live unit. The group feels that criticism has become less and less valid over the past several months. "You can only learn that by playing," Matt says. "We just didn't have the luxury of years of playing in front of small audiences and really learning how to perform. That's one of the trade-offs for not paying your dues, I suppose. So, I think we've learned a little bit more of what that is about. Hopefully, it has translated into us becoming a better band."

Dan says none of them were prepared for the demands of touring. "None of us had that experience before. It was my first attempt to be a front man," he says, laughing. "There was a lot of pressure to be natural on stage when I'd never had that position before.

"A lot of it is just getting comfortable on stage," he continues. "We can joke a little bit more and have fun, rather than



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being so concerned about what we look like. You can just enjoy the time you have there and just have fun with it. I've learned to have fun and not take it too seriously."

As much as the guys from Jars of Clay would like having fun to remain in the foreground, the criticisms do hurt and the pressure to top their previous success is very real. That success, Matt concedes, has often made Jars an easy target. "If some people felt like our first record was a joke, it's hard not to take that personally," he admits. "Part of me would like to say, *1.8 million records, a few people must have liked it*, people who didn't think it was just one good song and a bunch of crappy ones. I believe, for what we set out to do and what we had to work with and who we were, we made a pretty good first record. It's definitely true that the bigger you get, the more people feel like they have a right to voice their opinion on what you do and be as harsh as they want to about it."

"We cling to the promise that we are just one small part of the body of Christ," Matt continues. "We're not the saviors of Christian music or the youth or Generation X or anything like that. We're very aware there are people who won't like our music. And that's OK. But we would appreciate it if you give us your prayers nonetheless, as much as we feel called to lift up our brothers and sisters who reach people we're not going to be able to reach. There are people who the Lord has given us the opportunity to reach that other people won't reach, either. It would be a really neat thing to see fewer lines drawn in general in the church, whether it's musical lines, lifestyle lines, denomination lines, whatever. It would be a really cool thing if we could learn a little better what it means to be a little less judgmental."

Apparently, after several high pressure days of working side by side on this much anticipated project, the men of Jars of Clay have begun to have an effect on their engineer, Heff Moraes.

"I don't really care about religion or Christianity very much," admits Moraes. "I don't have any time for it. But Steve [Lipson] and I have worked with a lot of artists-most of which haven't achieved the level of success these guys have-who come in here and use drugs and they're cocky and rude. These guys are different. They are a pleasure to work with. They say 'please' and 'thank you' and they're not full of themselves. If Christianity gives people the desire to behave like these guys do, then it's probably worth checking into."

Comments like these make all the difference to Jars of Clay. When I mention to them what the engineer said, they are utterly shocked. They are so happy, they immediately tell me the difficulties they have had with these two guys over the months of recording. "We just gave up about talking about God with them," Dan says. "They were very harsh and we didn't seem to be getting anywhere. You have no idea how happy it makes us to hear that, while our words did very little, our actions left an impression. I think that's what we're about as a band, just building relationships and trying to love people."

Additional material was contributed by Chris Well and Bruce A. Brown.

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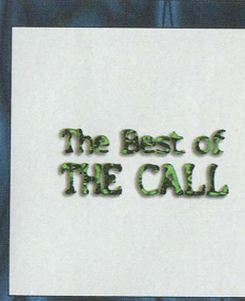
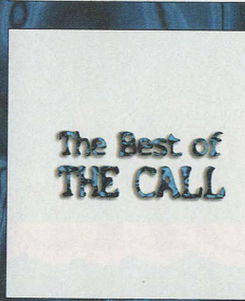




HOPE

["If we can't focus on the hope that we've found through our relationship with God, then how are we ever going to share it with a world that has basically lost its ability to search for meaning anymore? So that's the focus of all the songs."]

Where There's Pizza, There's Hope

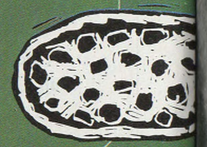
By Dan MacIntosh

www.register.com/blackball/

There we were, with the backdrop of children playing, large puppet figures singing, and pizza being consumed. It was an "intimate" dinner with the members of Blackball at Chuck E. Cheese, the kids' restaurant. Not your average interview setting, but then again, Blackball is not your average band.

This locale is walking distance from the famous Green Room studio in Southern California. It is here that

Blackball



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Blackball

Blackball is recording its latest Metro One album, Hope.

Blackball is led by the verbose and intelligent Chris Scott, who sits directly across from me sporting glasses, a UC-Berkeley sweatshirt, spouting brainy conversation. This gentle soul seems very different from the hopping, rapping, hippie-like figure who would lead the band through a set made up primarily of new music the next night at a well-known Hollywood club.

Though the group may call itself Blackball, categorizing this outfit is anything but a black and white proposition. How do you summarize a band made up of a former jazz freak, a couple of ex-death metal musicians, and a guy who digs '70s funk music? Remember, this is a group which surrounds its songs about deep theological issues in styles ranging from gospel to funk to hard rock and beyond.

The group was wise to choose Gene Eugene—who is kind of a walking, talking musical history book—as its producer. In fact, his band Adam Again was one of the first bands in the Christian community to mix black and white musical forms together in an authentic fashion. After hearing some of the rough mixes to the new Blackball album, this mixture appears to be exactly what this group is shooting for. It also reveals a band which has grown up a bit since its last release.

"Anybody who liked the last album will like *Hope*," states Scott confidently. "It's a little more mature musically. It's more of us writing as a group, I think."

Hope sounds more like a group project, due to a different approach the band took in creating it. "It was a conscious choice, and a natural progression," Scott continues. "It was conscious in that we all decided we would offer more of our own pieces to the puzzle, to make it more of a unified effort. It was natural in that we've been working with each other for a year and a half now. So we play together well, and we have similar ideas about what will sound good."

Scott draws upon the album's title, *Hope*, to express what the group is attempting to say on this release. He believes the name is fitting because he's convinced that this is a hopeful album. "People have traditionally thought of our stuff as being kind of dark," states Scott. "I don't think that it's dark, inasmuch as it deals with a lot of the different conflicts of the human soul. This album basically focuses on the fact that our society as a whole—not to mention the church itself—has kind of gone into almost a depth of despair to where things are not changing, and things are not getting better, so even the church itself is going, *Oh, we need to seclude ourselves, and just kind of protect ourselves from the world*, instead of just diving into where the problems are, and spreading the hope and love that we have in Christ.

"If we can't focus on the hope that we've found through our relationship with God," continues Scott, "then how are we ever going to share it with a world that has basically lost its ability to search for meaning anymore? So that's the focus of all the songs."

And to keep from bumming anybody out, Scott adds, "They're fun songs."

Seeing Blackball play live, you realize they do create fun songs. The group plays and moves with enthusiasm; each member contributes to the vocals, and the audience revels in the unit's loose and funky style. Blackball can both think and jam—a rarity, indeed.

As the night nears its end, and the rest of the world is tucked safely in their beds, Blackball is set to return to the studio to continue working on this album. Their dedication should come as no surprise, though, since Blackball is a group commissioned to bring the world its own unique combination of great funk and sincere hope.

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christine glass

Christine Glass stares hard into her cup of coffee, trying to respond to each of my questions with all the seriousness you'd expect from a witness at a murder trial.

Recognizing a long-standing tension, I ask how Glass approaches her work.

"It's definitely art," Glass says. "Music is my job, it's my art, it's my expression. It's all those things. Like anybody, I want to be understood. There's a part of that in my music. *Human*, the title of the album, is very important. All of the songs, to me, represent that title.

"I decided I wanted to pursue music as a career in high school after I became a Christian," she says. Growing up in a Catholic family in Shreveport, La., she listened to "the Who and the Rolling Stones, and a lot of old rock 'n' roll. I had an older brother, five years older than me, and I listened to anything he brought home. After I became a Christian, I listened to any Christian music I could get my hands on. The Choir was one of the first Christian bands that I ever heard and loved. But, I was also listening to Bryan Duncan, Rich Mullins, Amy Grant, everything. Now, I listen to just about everything—except country music. Suzanne Vega and Peter Gabriel are two of my favorites."

She got a degree in music—vocal performance, a classical degree—from Louisiana Tech University, then moved to Nashville. Once in the Christian music mecca, Glass went to work for Word Records—as a receptionist first, then later as an art director. There she met Tommy Greer, her producer and co-writer.

"I hadn't written many songs before, but I'd written poetry and stuff for myself. He'd give me a chord progression, a track of music, and I would write a melody and a lyric to go with it, and that's how we started."

She says talking with people one-on-one, or even more than that, in long-term close relationships with family and friends, is where she really gets to minister. "I think people can be ministered to through a concert or a record—I have been many, many times—but I don't think that's where the most effective, the most human, ministry happens. I try not to think so much of my music as my ministry," she explains, "but more that my life is my ministry. My ministry is to love people, that's what I'm called to do."

—Brian Q. Newcomb

split level

Q: What do you do once you've been hailed as the "Best Christian Rock Band" in Europe?

A: Go *glo.bal*, of course.

"For years we have been working with American artists in Europe, and they've always told us, You guys should come to America," says Split Level's founder and frontman Adrian Thompson. "Now the opportunity has come. The response from people who have heard the album has been great. It's very exciting. It's fresh. It's new to us all over again. In Europe, we're the old hands, but here, we're the new boys on the block."

Formed in the late '80s as a Celtic rock band, Split Level spent its first few years defining its line-up and redefining its sound. By 1990, the band's personnel had solidified, as Thompson (vocals/guitar) was joined by Gary Preston (bass/vocals) and Rob Craner (drums/vocals), and Split Level was sporting a more modern, edgy sound that might best be described as a cross between U2 and King's X.

"People still refer to us as a Celtic rock band, but to be honest, I think in some ways the only Celtic thing left in us is the passion," explains Thompson. "The rest of it is drawn from more modern influences. The music is modern, but perhaps the spirit behind it is a bit more passionate, more fervent."

"Because we are a three-piece," Preston continues, "there is a tendency for us to have to work a little bit harder at the sound that we create. Our live act is very energetic. We're not happy about people sitting in their seats during our show."

Split Level's relationship with newly-formed Organic Records promises to introduce this hard-working band to a whole new audience in the States with the release of their latest project, *glo.bal*. Touring stateside is also a goal of the band, if they can work it out with their "day jobs." Rob Craner teaches drums and percussion in a music store in Birmingham (England, not Alabama). Gary Preston is a barrister's clerk (i.e., he works in a law office), and Adrian Thompson is a label manager for a small Christian record company. At times, the commitment to both work and band may seem overwhelming, but Preston offers this observation:

"It's grace. We travel at least 100 miles to get to rehearsals and back every week. To be honest, I can't think of any one aspect that drives us to do this other than we all have a real sense that God is doing something, even though we can't quite put our finger on it. We're moving forward in faith, but we don't know where we are going. We just know we haven't gotten there yet."

—Mike Parker

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PAMPLIN MUSIC DISTRIBUTION

loudflower

In the past two years, some of Atlanta's best young bands have finally gotten a break. The Waiting, Smalltown Poets and Third Day have landed major label deals-now it's Loudflower's turn. Loudflower places horns up front in a mix that's distinctly rock-you'll hear no ska or reggae and very little R&B in the band's debut, *Happy Now?* Instead, artists like Van Morrison and The Waterboys come quickly to mind. Group leader Rob Gruver (bassist/vocalist/songwriter) recently stopped by for a chat with managing editor Bruce A. Brown.

BAB: I first had Loudflower described to me as a Christian band that's not really a Christian band. Is that accurate?

RG: Loudflower is more of a nighttime bar band. We have a lot of fun, but we feel our beliefs come through in our music. I like to think of the group more as a spiritual band. The focus of our songs is really love, understanding and tolerance. To us, it's more an issue of how you live your life. Everyone has a certain core belief-mine happens to be Christianity. If you listen to our songs, you'll know what we believe and why we believe it. The decision-making part is still in the hands of the listener.

BAB: Your songs don't have a lot of the buzzwords that some Christian listeners are going to want to hear. The songs seem to be much more personal, more confessional.

RG: I don't think you have to slam somebody over the head with your message. Bands like U2 and Live speak to me; groups whose internal struggles become externalized in their songs. Hopefully, my songs strike people in such a way that it will make them look deeper and think harder about what they believe.

BAB: Loudflower has a unique sound for a rock band, with a rhythm section and horns doing a lot of vocal-like lead parts.

RG: Usually with this kind of configuration, you're playing reggae or ska. I've always heard horn lines while writing, so one day, I just decided to take it in a different direction. We never really approached it with a brassy, jazzy sound, like Chicago. I think that's why we have our own sound.

BAB: The album has been released through Christian distribution, which I don't think was originally your plan. Do you feel uneasy about that?

RG: I believe we have a lot of important things to say to the Christian community, and I feel we say them in an unconventional way, in a way maybe they're not used to hearing. I feel like we've been directed to this marketplace for a reason. We're very proud of what we've recorded and excited to see what happens next. I believe we can make a positive impression with our music. From there, God only knows.

—Bruce A. Brown

reviews

Switchfoot, a power pop trio from the San Diego, Calif., area, are well-scrubbed surfer dudes (two college students; one recent high school graduate), who have been as influenced by New Wave artists like The Police and XTC as current modern rock bands like Sugar, Jellyfish and Everclear.

I first listened to *The Legend of Chin* in a small songwriter's studio, with a nervous label exec waiting for my opinion after every song. Because I was stunned that a young band could exude such talent and charisma, I left the studio glassy-eyed and speechless. And for the next week, *Chin* was the only tape I played in my car. Three months later, I'm still finding reasons to listen to it regularly .

When you base your approach on classic pop, as Switchfoot has, success depends on how completely you make that sound your own; the innovations which separate copycats from pioneers. Switchfoot plays intricately-arranged songs that are lyrically and musically smart, without being self-consciously clever. Chin is simultaneously brilliant and effortless, and already on my short list for one of the 10 best albums of the year.

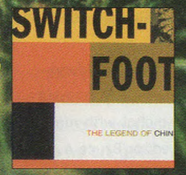
When you find a writer as promising as Jonathan Foreman, it's tempting just to recite a laundry list of terrific lyrics (OK, let me cite just a few examples). "Bomb," which leads off the disc, finds Foreman thanking God for revealing Himself by exclaiming: *This is the bomb that I've been waiting for, looking for/You finally lit the fuse that's in my head*; or "Chem 6A," which addresses apathy while never actually talking about chemistry class and "Might Have Ben Hur," which spoofs the title of that classic biblical film while lamenting lost love.

Just as captivating is the way Switchfoot's music draws you in. For the most part, the band avoids a "verse-chorus-verse" approach to writing; for example, "Life and Love and Why" features four distinct melodies without ever hitting what one would call a chorus.

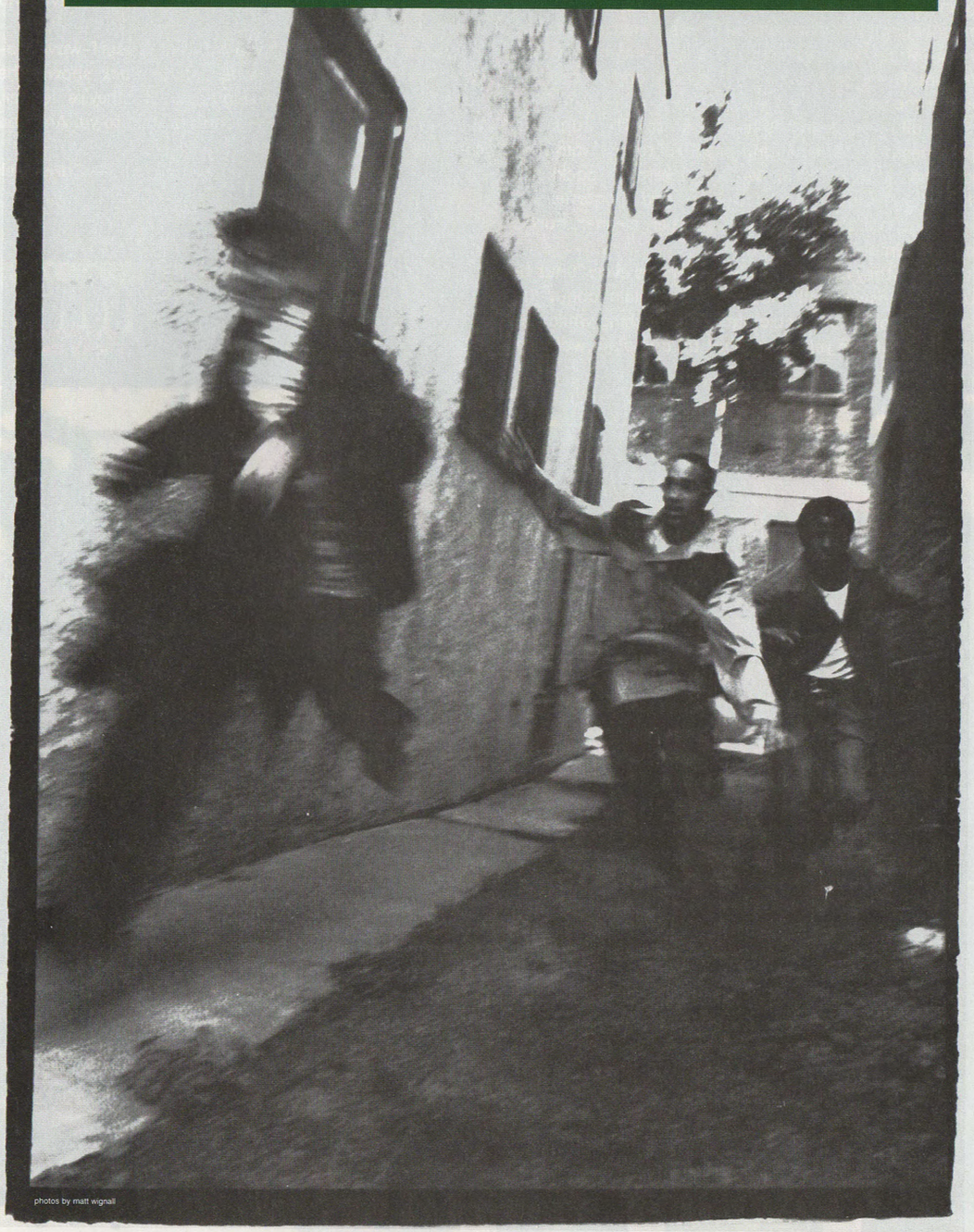
Then, there's the mysterious "Chin," of the album title and song "Ode to Chin." It wouldn't be sporting to give away too much of the game, but suffice it to say you won't be disappointed as you learn more about this "legendary" character. That sense of humor is only one of many aspects of Switchfoot's debut which makes the young band so charming.

— Father Mosh

Switchfoot
The Legend of Chin
re:think



BRAINWASH PROJECTS



photos by matt wignall

reviews

With an exuberant shout, the blur of horns and electric guitars and a backbeat stomp for the angels, The O.C. Supertones return in spades with *Supertones Strike Back*.

As one of the original "third wave" ska-core bands, they introduced scores of mainstream pop fans to the rampant fun of an underground phenomenon. Since then, the ska-influenced Christian rock community has swelled to include Five Iron Frenzy, The Insyderz and Silage, with more on the way.

Since all of those bands have a lot to offer fans, The Supertones needed something powerful to maintain their lead—and *Supertones Strike Back* certainly packs the wallop. They still have all of the fun and spontaneity of their debut, but *Strike Back* is a sharper, cleaner, harder album. It simply sounds great.

Lyrically, they are still as in your face as ever: "Shut Up and Play" answers all those who complain about The Supertones' practice of straight-out preaching while they rock (*I hear them yell at us, shut up and play/ well, who asked what you think?/ He went all out for us, say what you will/ I'll answer to my God*); "Tonight" is a rockin' bedtime prayer (*If I die here tonight, I know my soul is with you*); "Perseverance of the Saints" is an anthem of commitment in the face of persecution; "Like No One Else" reminds that God cares about everything in our lives, no matter how small.

With a strong case of ska-influenced, surf-wave flavored rock 'n' roll, *Supertones Strike Back* shows The Supertones are no fly-by-night outfit: They're leaner, they're meaner, and they're gonna preach to ya. And you can take that to the bank.

— Chris Well

Supertones
Supertones Strike Back
BEC

Mature is often a word synonymous with old; it's usually presumed that one has to have a certain amount of mileage on their odometer before maturity is obtained. But with *Flying*, Grammatrain—Pete Stewart, Dalton Roraback and Paul Roraback—put forth the argument that a band can achieve greatness, even as early as a second album.

One does not usually describe the music of a Christian rock band as "ferocious," but that seems the most appropriate word to apply to Grammatrain. The potent trio, often lumped in with Pacific Northwest stalwarts such as Pearl Jam and Soundgarden, continues to display similar influences on *Flying*, while simultaneously drawing from a much broader musical spectrum, including The Doors, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Stryper(!) and R.E.M.

The opening whisper of Pete Stewart's voice on "Jonah" is somewhat deceptive; but almost immediately, the band slams into the provocative chorus—*I think I'm drowning and the ocean is raging/ My smile is frowning and my insides are praying*. Pete's growl, Dalton's massive bass runs and Paul's insistent and inventive drum parts form a wall of sound that's impossible to ignore. "Less of Me" follows that same path and features an even thicker sludge of guitars by Stewart.

The first indication that Grammatrain is surveying new musical territory comes on the title track. "Flying" finds Stewart exploring his love of the allegorical writing of C.S. Lewis, mixing his fractured tale with the sounds of Magical Mystery Tour era Beatles. "Rocketship" also mines a similar lyrical vein, inviting us to take a look at our world from God's perspective. Stewart's pointed lyric suggests that perhaps our problems wouldn't seem so overwhelming from that vantage point.

But the cut which stunned me from the very first listen is "Pain." In the context of Christian lyrics, the idea of pain is generally very abstract; a feeling that exists only to give the Lord something to take away. But Stewart, fully aware of his imperfect nature, sees pain as a path to God, not something blocking communion. Responding in the fashion of the Apostle Paul, Pete sings, *I find, through every ounce of pain I feel/ That my mind cannot deny that God is real*. Grammatrain's willingness to confront the hypocrisy of the church (and itself) and still experience compassion, forgiveness and grace makes *Flying* a truly exceptional release.

— Andy DuFresne

Grammatrain
Flying
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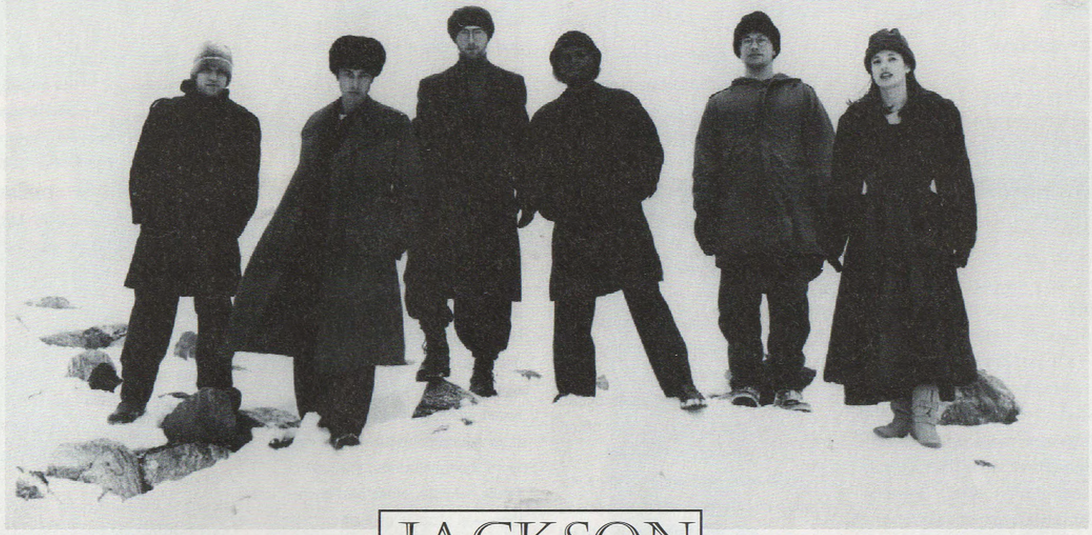

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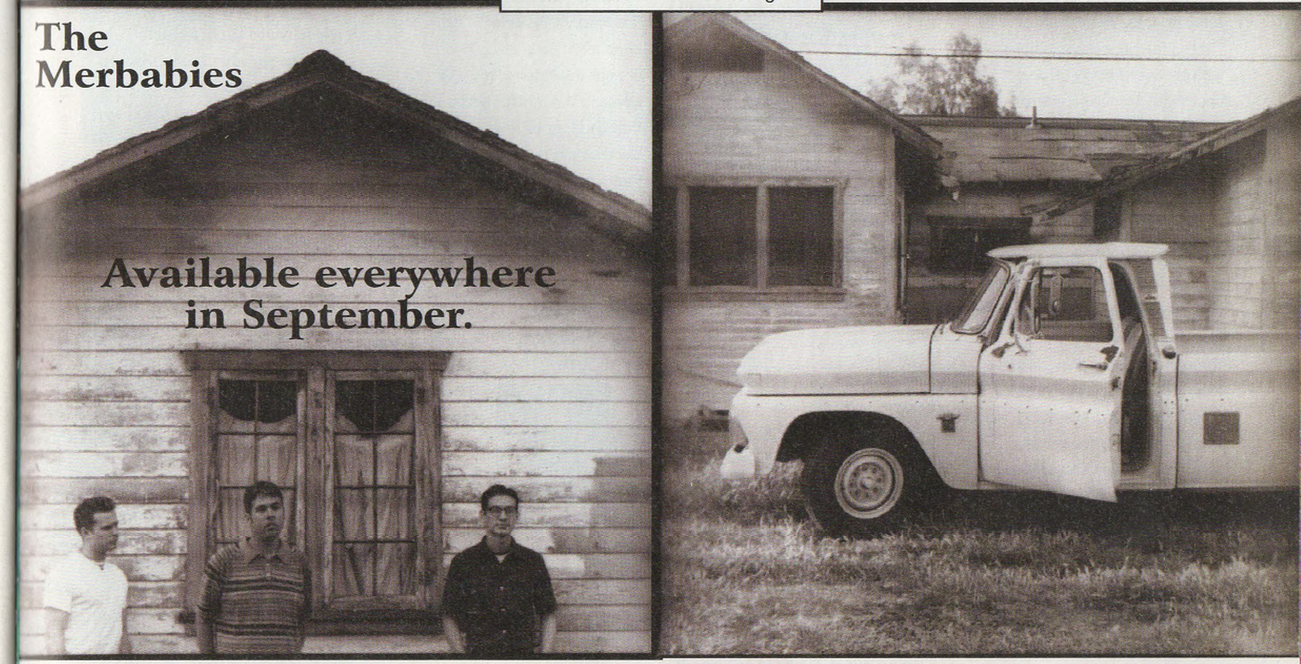

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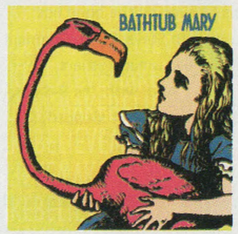

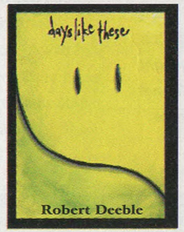

reviews

Stavesacre
Absolutes
Tooth & Nail

Some things in life are certain: We are in desperate need of salvation, and there is a sovereign Lord who offers life. While these ideas are hardly new to Christian rock, they are infused with fresh, poetic life on *Absolutes*, a dark and brilliant manifesto of Christian faith. With Stavesacre, though, you can be assured that, while their latest is a work of art, it is as if someone took the painting and smashed you over the head with it.

With the passion and fury of muscular hard rock, Stavesacre blows through like a force of nature: the drums roll by like thunder; the bass rumbles with the inevitability of an oncoming storm; the guitars shoot and slice like random lightning bolts; the lead vocal shouts against the wind, which tears at whatever isn't bolted down.

Cloaked in the discordant pop are lyrics that encourage leaving behind the sin nature and pursuing the Christian life: Yes, we are saved by grace through faith, but there is still a responsibility for us to follow through (Romans 7:14–8:17). More than once, the lyrics use the image of a desert snake shedding its skin, most notably in "Shiv" and "Wither"; the ongoing struggle with the flesh and the importance of turning back to God come through in "Sand Dollar" and "Two Heavens"; the joy of the new life in Christ is celebrated in "Ascend."

The centerpiece is "Colt .45," a religious debate: *I thought about what you said/ and I'm not sorry for a thing*, the lead vocalist opines. He defends his position (*cannot discard this as emotion/ this is not a passing stage*) before drawing from Ecclesiastes (*vanity of vanities/ each breath you breathe is grasping at the wind*). Although it is a hard response, it is also one that is fair.

Maybe *Absolutes* was created out of real life conversations, maybe it's simply academic. Whichever it is, Stavesacre has made an artistic and spiritual statement, a resource for loud apologetic discussion.

—CSW

The Electrics
The Electrics
SaraBellum Records

5 Minute Walk—SaraBellum's parent label—has introduced us to some of the most enjoyable modern rock bands that we've heard in recent years. Artists like Seven Day Jesus, Black Eyed Seven (now Model Engine), Dime Store Prophets, Dryve and Five Iron Frenzy have come from the SMW/SaraBellum stable. Now, for the first time, the label has gone off shore—to the United Kingdom—to sign a band, and it has landed a winner.

The Electrics, who hail from Scotland and Ireland, have consistently been named one of the most popular live acts in Europe for the past seven years. During that time, the group has released three full-length discs and one EP, but none of its material has received wide distribution in America. Like fellow U.K. band Iona, The Electrics' exposure in the United States has been limited mostly to festival appearances and showcases—probably fewer than 12 gigs in the past four years. But with bands like The Wallflowers and Counting Crows bringing roots-flavored music back to the airwaves, the time seems right for The Electrics' Celtic-rock stew to find favor with American audiences.

Three members of the group—leader/bassist Sammy Horner, guitarist Paul Baird and drummer Davie McCarthur—have been together for more than seven years, giving The Electrics a tight sound sometimes missing from younger bands. Mandolin, fiddle, whistle, pipes and accordion—all staples of Celtic music—add a flavor to the band's songs that is simultaneously melancholy and festive. Titles like "Back of Your Head," "Disciples of Disaster," "Two Buns" and "Pour Me A Pint" prompt the listener to delve into Horner's thoughtful lyrics. And that adds up to this—The Electrics are a terrific band. All that's missing is an appreciative audience, so get on board.

—Father McMosh

Hokus Pick
The B-Sides
Freedom

Although victimized by the darker side of record deals, Hokus Pick has continued to be one of the hardest working bands in Christian music. The Canadian foursome maintains its nonstop touring; its live show has wowed fans all over, as the band has toured with Steve Taylor, Guardian and dc Talk, among others.

And, with *The B-Sides*, we see they haven't stopped recording, either. Newly signed to Freedom, their first all-new record comes out later this year; however, to those who need a new Pick, *The B-Sides* sports a variety of unreleased material, including lost tracks, live tracks and even some new songs.

The band's fun brand of guitar pop shines in a variety of ways: The unreleased, live gem "Learn to Laugh" (deemed "too funny" by the producer to appear on *Brothers From Different Mothers*), about keeping your cool in the face of adversity, draws examples from life, Dennis the Menace and R.E.M.. Pick's remakes of Petra's "Adonai" and The Clash's "Train in Vain" (a different version appeared on *Bookaboom*) bring a fresh perspective to two classics. The studio nonsense of "Felize Navidad" is fun, too, before it disintegrates (and then the real fun begins). Of the newer songs (post-*Bookaboom*), "Super Hero," sports a dark-edged guitar riff as Pick contrasts life in the comic books with the parameters of reality; "Waiting" is a dark and brooding discussion of how we're stranded without the Lord.

By its very nature, *The B-Sides* is directed towards fans; newcomers might find it hard to sit through the uneven collection. However, those who know and love the band need this record. They'll be (sorry) "b-sides" themselves.

—CSW

Various Artists
Spin This
Alarmra

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reviews

of whom populate the pages of *7ball*—Frontline was one of the lone voices, crying in the wilderness of contemporary Christian music.

Spin This makes the case that, after years of floundering, the label that opened doors for so many is back with a shovel to dig up the next generation of modern rock and rap. And a mighty strong case it is.

The collection is broken into three basic categories, to give the listener perspective: There are tracks from brand-new and upcoming releases; tracks from records released in the past two years; and tracks from the Frontline vault. As a listening experience, *Spin This* certainly pushes a lot of the right buttons: The new tracks include gruff ska-core sensations The Insyderz and hardcore/metal/rappers Every Day Life. The second category includes some fine work from legends Poor Old Lu, rocker Kevin Clay, the sweet electro-pop of Echoing Green, the eclectic stew of Chaos is the Poetry and the hardcore rap of Gospel Gangstas and CMC's. The "classic" category is headed up by pioneers Michael Knott and Christian punkers The Altar Boys.

Given what's in those vaults, the only disappointment of *Spin This* is that there isn't more of the "classic" category (and the Michael Knott track is pretty recent); there's a box set in there somewhere. As a modern rock and hip hop collection, though, *Spin This* shows that some of the younger indie labels may want to keep a lookout: This is one dog that still has some teeth left.

—Dylan Charles

Every Day Life
American Standard
Alarma

Don't be scared. Seething with righteous anger, Every Day Life comes on like a reprimand from the Old Testament prophets. The band laments how far the standard in America has fallen morally, socially and spiritually. With a hardcore mix of metal and rap (which some compare to Rage Against the Machine), and with producer Michael Knott (who knows a few things about angry music himself), EDL intends to convince us of our need for sorrowful repentance as a nation.

"Ten Little Indians" indicts those who have destroyed other cultures and slaughtered innocents in the name of Christ and "missionary" work. The song "Touched" is written from the perspective of a girl who was molested, spitting anger at her attacker. "Tempest" demonstrates the growing unrest of neglected children, as the frustration builds over time. "Closure" is about the destructiveness of church politics. "Electric Starter" details the loneliness of an impersonal society where the phrase "How are you?" is only a greeting, but not a question (*You don't know the pain I have inside/ I keep my feelings bottled up inside*).

With "Transcend," the members of EDL make it clear it's not just finger-pointing, but confession, as well: We're all guilty and in need of forgiveness (*change can only come through the heart of the sincere/ sincerity without change is never made clear*). No matter how righteous your anger is, they're saying, your anger needs to be resolved in a healthy, Christian manner.

Every Day Life has a heart for the hurting and a hand reached out to the disenfranchised. In the process, they aren't afraid to call the American church onto the carpet for its inability to be salt and light in our culture, and for its crimes against its own members. It's a hard sermon to be sure, but *American Standard* would make Elijah proud.

—CsW

Nina
I'm Your Child
Light Records

You may remember Nina Llopis as the bassist/vocalist for the 80s punk band, The Lead. After The Lead disbanded in 1991, Nina entered the next phase of her musical endeavors by starting a solo career with her band, Out of Egypt. Nina says that with The Lead, she was heavily involved in evangelism, but her solo efforts allow her to incorporate worship into her songs. *I'm Your Child* does in fact reflect a more mature artist.

Her message is straightforward, with the music on *I'm Your Child* communicating Christ and his love in a personal way. Lyrically, the songs are simple but meaningful, an intimate expression of Nina's feelings. Many of the ten cuts on the project serve as an encouragement to believers. "I Won't Be Afraid," and "No Tears," talk about the comfort and hope found in the Lord, while the title track is a prayer that cries out to God.

Nina's sound and musical style are reminiscent of female rockers such as Julianna Hatfield, Joan Osborne and Sheryl Crow, yet *I'm Your Child* has more variety and emotion than comparable releases. Nina's presentation validates the authenticity of the Gospel message, and the whole package drives it home with dynamic rock arrangements.

—Ginny McCabe

Blackball
Hope
Metro One

With its second album, Blackball takes us back to when old school funk ruled the airwaves. Though they fall a little short of the glory which was Parliament-Funkadelic, *Hope* contains enough musical nuggets to bring back fond memories of otherworldly funkateers like Bootsy Collins, Sly Stone, and James Brown.

Rocco Sigona certainly has the right idea when it comes to scratching out great guitar riffs. The opener "Funk For Breakfast," for example, is one love rollercoaster of a jam. While Sigona seems comfortable in his platform shoes, singer Christopher Scott often comes across as forever belting it out when he ought to be holding it back. If he really wants to feel the funk, then he needs to learn how to lay back and let the groove breathe now and again.

Criticisms aside, *Hope* sounds great. Gene Eugene expertly produced this record by coaxing great performances out of the band, as well as providing keyboards on many of the house-rocking tracks. And as for brass, "I Just Don't Know" alone features enough horn parts to trick you

 don't trust the critic who doesn't like anything.

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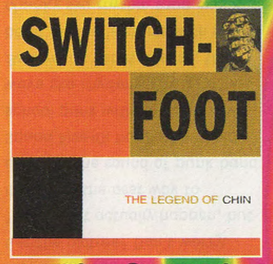
The Supertones



The Legend Of Chin
Switchfoot

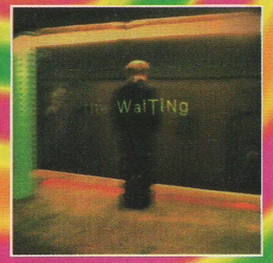
Flying
Grammatrain

Reality Check

Skillet

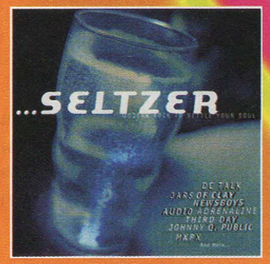
Space
Bleach

Smalltown Poets



The Waiting

Considering Lily



Seltzer

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SPARROW STAR SONG FOREFRONT re:think BEC Recording

reviews

The Huntingtons
Fun and Games
Flying Tart

Disclaimer for those who love punk, but were disheartened by the perceived lack of "Christian" content in MxPx's *Life In General* album: you will really hate The Huntingtons.

Actually, that's not completely fair. Musically, there's a lot for you to love about *Fun and Games*. It's unquestionably legit punk music, and it is assuredly lots of fun. And if you listen hard enough beneath the buzz-saw guitars and "tribute to The Ramones" tempos, you'll certainly hear Christian messages. For example, the opening "Allison's The Bomb" is a tribute to a girl who *must've [come] straight out of heaven*; "Lucy's About to Lose Her Mind" is about a person desperate to know life's meaning but still refusing the help of friends; "The Only One" is the story of a boy and girl struggling to maintain their purity in the face of physical temptations.

But the bulk of the songs, much like those on *Life In General*, are just about being a kid. There's stories of bullies ("Don't Beat Me Up"), babysitters ("She's A Brat") and druggies ("Crackhead"). And there's still more boy/girl tunes—"All She Knows Is Breaking," "Losing Penny," "Friday Night at the Rec"—all of which are innocent without being cloying. These guys know their way around a hook and deliver the lyrical goods, though not in the evangelistic fashion for which some listeners might hope.

—BAB

Resurrection Band
Ampendectomy
Grrr

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Resurrection Band in the history of Christian rock. As the hard rock music ministry outreach of Chicago's Jesus People USA since 1972, they have always been more interested in work and ministry than in flash and trend. They've stretched the boundaries of what's acceptable in Christian music. They've tied their music ministry to social and spiritual causes. As part of JPUSA, they've reached out and ministered to the homeless, the hungry, the abused, the lost and broken.

For their 25th anniversary, Resurrection Band celebrates with an acoustic retrospective, *Ampendectomy*. With fresh arrangements, the band covers all the bases, from a pained "Broken Promises" (from their label debut, Awaiting Your Reply) to "Across These Fields" (from their last, the concept album Lament). It's laudable that this is no "reunion" record—every member has been with the group since that first record (even the "new guy," bassist Roy Montroy, was on the first record).

Although fans will never be truly served until the whole Rez catalogue is reissued on CD (a big box set would be nice), *Ampendectomy* will do for now. It's a welcome note from old friends, and a delightful way to remember the old times.

—CsW

P.O.D.
(Payable On Death)
Brown
Rescue Records

The color brown may be defined as a combination of red, black and yellow. But *Brown*, the latest release from P.O.D. is much more striking than that.

The album displays a number of pictures through songs that are more complex than mere "paint by numbers" sketches. P.O.D. addresses current issues, but their bottom line is always leading people to the cross of Christ.

"Full Color," Sandoval's testimony, was written about his mother's death from leukemia at age 36. While she lay on her deathbed, Sonny was faced with a choice, and the day she died, he gave his life to the Lord. He recounts part of the story in the hard-hitting lyrics *Why 'O why did my mommy have to die/Too many questions, no answers confuses my mind/Like what did I do, what did she do/Who's to blame...*

Brown is primarily rapcore, but the band supplements its groove-oriented sound with hard core, Latin jazz and reggae. Listeners who identify with the sound of Rage Against The Machine or Six Feet Deep will want to check out P.O.D.

—Ginny McCabe

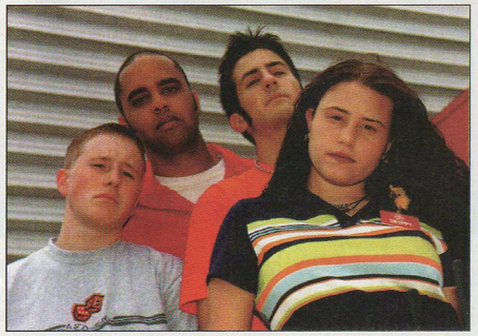
Squad Five-O
What I Believe
Bulletproof

Imagine the hard-edged punk band Ninety-Pound Wuss driving home from a gig. The car swerves in an effort to miss hitting a harpless armadillo and "Bam!" The band collides with an oncoming car carrying The Supertones. The crash leaves the band members unharmed, but The Supertones' horns are rendered useless. Get the picture? Don't worry. That didn't actually happen, but it may be the best way to describe the sound of punk band Squad Five-O: hard-edged, old school punk with hornless third wave ska rhythms. On *What I Believe*, its debut release, the band generally starts with a chunky ska rhythm than explodes into a blistering punk beat. Vocal clarity is often not a priority on this recording. The song "Differences," with its mild, laid-back reggae rhythm, is the sole exception. Some listeners will be thankful for that fact that it's one of the shortest songs, as the singer's vocal approach, shall we say, lacks subtlety—admittedly, not a requirement for punk rock.

There's probably been too much better-than-average punk produced in the past year for Squad Five-O to make huge waves anywhere else besides the punk market. And even there, the band will likely be into thinking you've been transported to the Newport Jazz Festival for just a moment.

Elsewhere, many of the most musically adventurous songs here click like a seamless channel surf back and forth between groove-a-licious dance beats and chunky hard rock stomps. In other words, this is one hot 'n spicy funk-rock feast for the ears.

—Dan MacIntosh



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reviews

Breakthrough, his biker-grunge take on Mark Heard's "We Know Too Much," and two songs recorded with Bruce Cockburn which are previously unrelease. Those two songs also represent the future of the band, which has recorded a new CD to be released independently.

Michael Been and The Call have weathered more trials than many more successful acts. *The Best of The Call* may be the best chance a new generation of music lovers has to discover their challenging and uncompromising music.

—Brad Caviness

it was a revelation to listeners looking for something new. Fourteen years later, it's the penultimate track to *The Best of the Call*, the new compilation project for Warner Resound and the band's first exclusively for the Christian market, and it's still just as exciting.

The disc opens with "Let the Day Begin," The Call's biggest hit and a cheerful pop benediction that, like much of singer/writer/bassist Michael Been's work with the band, takes on the character of the Psalmist. "I Still Believe" was a bigger hit for Russ Taff, but didn't capture the anguish of the trial of faith as effectively as The Call's version. "I Don't Wanna" still beats its breast, rends its clothes and draws tears for the prodigal love who has not returned. "What's Happened to You?" from The Call's last full length disc, *Red Moon*, features a rootsier, more settled version of the band that revels in the changes that redemption brings to the human spirit.

The Best of also contains two tracks from Been's outstanding 1994 solo record, *On the Verge of a Nervous*

overshadowed by an abundance of artists that have a more musically satisfying package. But with a lot of hard work, Squad Five-0 may yet reach the upper echelon of this quickly-growing genre of Christian music.

—Chad Bonham

The Call
The Best of The Call
Warner Resound

"The Walls Came Down" introduced much of the world to The Call in 1983. With ragged post-punk guitars and vocals drawing on Old Testament images from the fall of Jericho,

NINA
i'm your child

"Nina's sound and musical style are reminiscent of female rockers such as Julianna Hatfield, Joan Osborne, and Sheryl Crow, yet I'M YOUR CHILD has more variety and emotion than comparable releases. Nina's presentation validates the authenticity of the Gospel message and the whole package drives it home with dynamic rock arrangements."
-7 Ball Magazine

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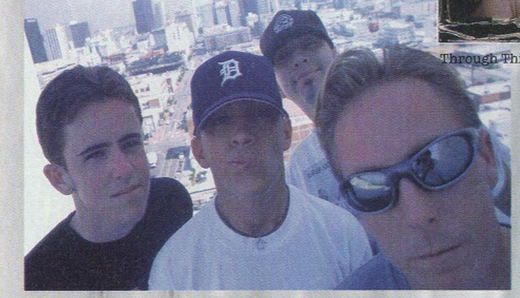

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No Compromise

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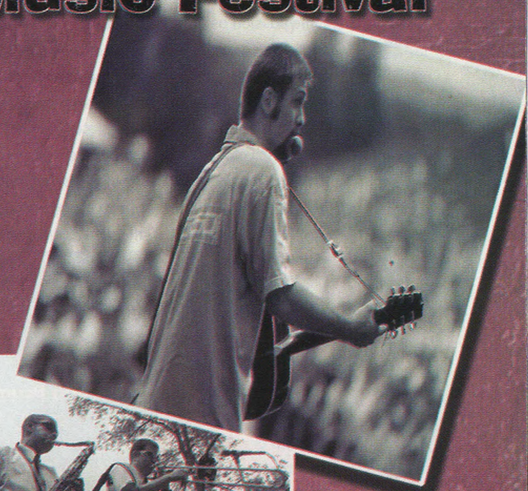

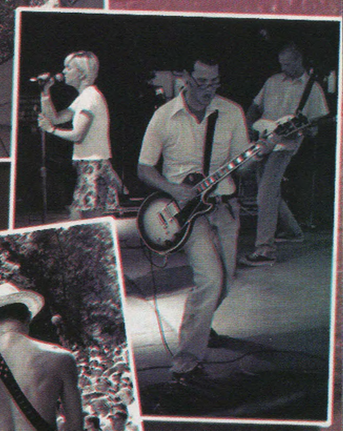

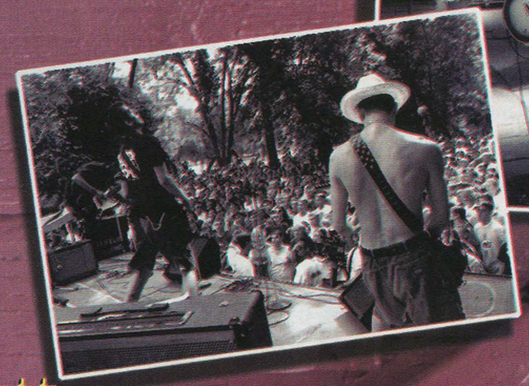

The Bands

Third Day
Supertones
Sixpence None The Richer
Five Iron Frenzy
Sarah Jahn
Morella's Forest
Fold Zandura
Jawbone Hill
Ghoti Hook
Plumb
Danielson Family
Dryve
Rainchildren
Nic Giaconia
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The Art Gallery will feature national, regional and local artists. For submissions call Heather (330)971-9008 or email "R3JAB@VM1.CC.UAKRON.EDU

SMART RECORDS

Produced By underground 7 PRISM MAGAZINE Our House

people

sigmund brouwer by brad cauiness

Many Christian fiction writers are afraid to infuse their novels with the same passion as best-seller general market authors. Not so for Sigmund Brouwer. The author of thrillers *Double Helix* and *Blood Ties* delivers suspense and action, while intelligently conveying a message. His cinematic writing style puts him in company with Grisham or Crichton—but with considerably more economy, giving his books the punch his contemporaries typically reserve for the last hundred pages.

How characters resolve conflicts in his books ultimately moves not only the plot, but also helps readers connect with the moral issues at stake. "In general, anytime you have a conflict, there is a moral issue," he says. "What amazes me is that secular authors often avoid the obvious moral issues, really obvious moral questions that never seem to get asked."

Blood Ties is about a man who must confront a stalker, presumed dead for 20 years, that has reappeared in his wife's life and begun to terrorize her again. The man, Clay Garner, is an FBI "mind profiler" whose job is to get inside the mind of evil and disturbed criminals to try and catch them. In effect, he has to stalk the stalker.

The story was inspired by a friend of Brouwer's who was stalked when she was younger. He says he also began to wonder about the psychological state of someone who had spent a lifetime looking into the most evil things that man can do.

"What is that going to do to your understanding of how God operates in your world?" he asks. "I have a character that asks Garner toward the end, How do you hold on to a belief in a loving God in the face of the evil in the world? How do you turn to God when you wonder if He's abandoned you? I think these are natural questions a lot of believers and non-believers ask. How do we answer them with promise and grace?"

Brouwer lets the action of his characters answer those questions for him. Their motivations are captured in the details of their behavior; the author hopes those nuances will lead readers to an examination of the issues.

"Clay Garner is going to have to choose whether or not to kill this man who stalked his wife and kidnapped their child," he says. "His actions are going to show that choice, I hope, much more effectively than five pages of him thinking about it."

Those actions, however, have a great potential for violence, which many critics say *Blood Ties* and *Double Helix* are offer in gratuitous amounts. Brouwer says each violent episode in his books has a point; the action depends on the individual character in each situation.

"If you're writing about a genetic scientist who is obsessed with secret experiments involving human embryos [as in *Double Helix*], it's going to be a different situation than a lone cowboy searching for God and trying to win back the woman he loves," Brouwer says. "If it's true that a reader learns from what a character thinks in a situation of conflict, then I hope to write the different arenas of conflict differently and accurately."

Done well, the action, characters and issues will play out like a movie in the reader's imagination. Indeed, unlike previous generations who grew up with only books, today's readers have an unshakable influence from movies and television that colors the way they approach books.

"People of my generation and younger tend to get impatient with books, because we're used to the way action unfolds on the screen," Brouwer says. "Most of my audience has seen and experienced much of the world through television or multimedia. Fifty years ago, if I wanted to describe the remote mountains of Mexico, I better have spent five pages because you've never seen it before. Today, I can liken it to a picture that's already in your head and I can get on with the story."

Brouwer gives a good deal of slow thought to the way he mixes his faith with his work. It surprises him to be called a "Christian writer," because to him, religion and faith have never seemed to be separate from daily living.

"My dad is a mechanic and he's also a Christian, but you wouldn't call him a Christian mechanic," Brouwer says. "What my dad believes will show up in how he works and how he treats his customers. And what I believe shows up in the fabric of my writing."

collision point

By Doug Brumley

Once again it's time to pay a visit to that magical point at which music and multimedia intersect. This month finds us turning our internet browsers to two web sites which cover the alternative Christian music scene, each going about it a little differently.

Ricochet Music
http://www.ricochetmusic.com

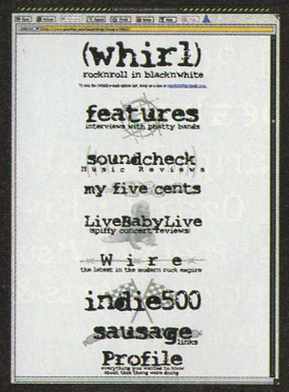
With its clean layout and polished appearance, *Ricochet Music* makes a good first impression. Instead of positioning itself as an "underground" 'zine, this monthly web magazine seems to be going for a more professional vibe. The use of HTML table tags gives the site the feel of a magazine, while a few choice animated GIF images spice things up a bit. Visitors are welcomed with the month's current features, and an archive offers access to past articles too.

The list of featured bands—Audio Adrenaline, Grammatrain, Five Iron Frenzy, and Bleach to name a few—shows that *Ricochet* chats with the big names and leans towards the more popular acts. Some more obscure bands are covered in the reviews and "Indie Beat" columns while the fairly extensive news section compiles items from various sources (such as the *Pure Rock Report* and our own *7ball*).

There are also tour dates for a number of artists and links to other web resources of note. But in contrast to all of this attempted professionalism is the writing. Authors in the feature and review sections often take a very conversational tone which occasionally verges on cheerleading for certain artists or albums. The album reviews are surprisingly short as well.

Other small drawbacks to the site include a few bad links from page to page and strange characters imbedded in the text on some pages. Although the content could use a bit more objectivity, depth, and originality, it is obvious that those behind the scenes at *Ricochet Music* have put a lot of time into creating a free source for Christian alternative music on the 'net. They've also made it a point to be accessible to the readers, so feel free to email your thoughts and questions to them after checking out the site.

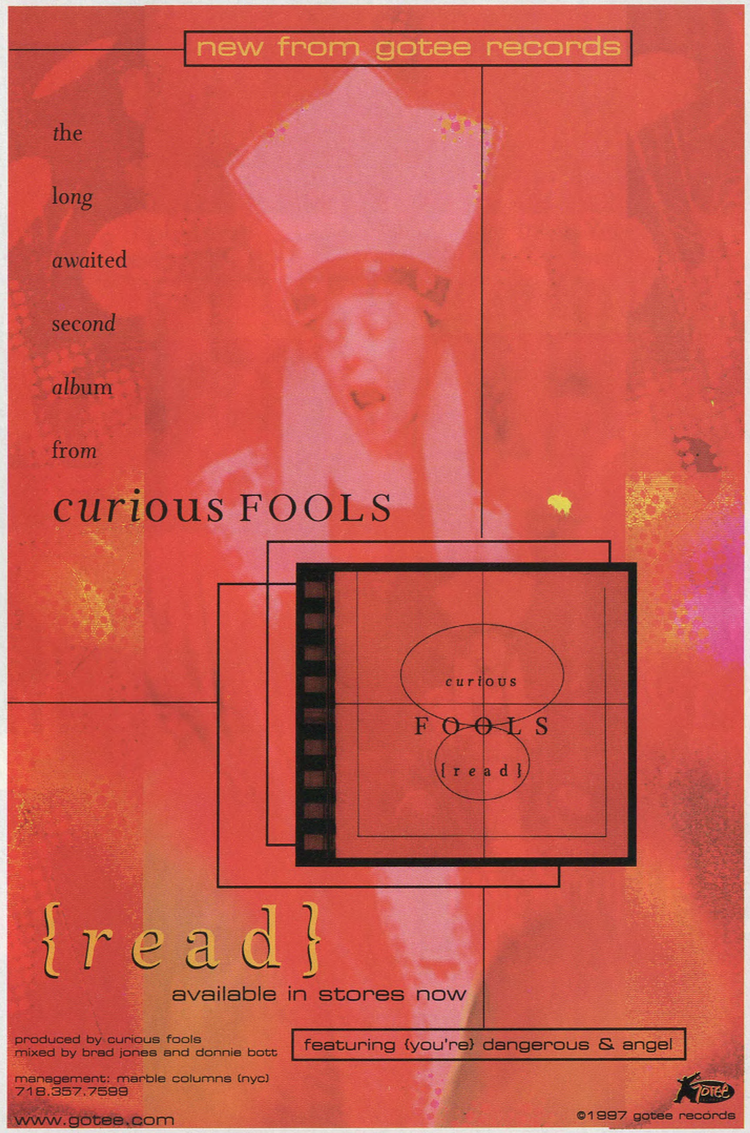
(whirl) http://www.jesusfreak.com/whirl



In the spirit of xeroxed black and white stapled 'zines everywhere comes *(whirl)*. In fact, the site bills itself as "rock 'n' roll in black 'n' white." Unlike most 'zines, however, the site sports an uncluttered layout featuring hip, well-designed graphics and clever section headings. Features are the highlight of *(whirl)*, with Q and A interviews quizzing such bands as Dime Store Prophets, Vigilantes of Love and Caedmon's Call.

But instead of simply questioning the same flavor-of-the-month artists that every print mag is covering, *(whirl)* also goes to the movers and shakers that fans of the alternative scene want to hear from. For example, features on Aaron Sprinkle, Tim Taber, and Jeff Cloud (founder of Velvet Blue Music) offer updates on the happenings of artists that have sometimes been forgotten or overlooked by the conventional magazines.

Other sections include "Soundcheck" (music reviews), "My Five Cents" (editorials/commentaries), "LiveBabyLive" (concert reviews), "Wire" (news), "Indie 500" (independent artist report), and "Sausage Links" (links to other pages and resources). In addition, a sound-clip section offers a rotating selection of sample audio downloads from new bands. Grammatically-correct readers will notice typos here and there, but the site is written by a small group of young and knowledgeable followers of the scene. This offers a blunt perspective often lacking in more polished publications and occasionally results in some bizarre questions or interviews that aren't quite as probing as you might like. New material is posted to the site frequently and visitors can join the *(whirl)* email list to receive notification of site updates.



PURE rock report

Loud

1. ETHEREAL SCOURGE — Warary (Rowe)
2. NAILED — Drowning (Rugged)
3. FRANK'S ENEMY — Torturer (Cling)
4. P.O.D. — Breathe Babylon (Rescue)
5. SIX FEET DEEP — Steadfast (REX)
6. MORTIFICATION — Mephibosheth (Rowe)
7. ULTIMATUM — World Of Sin (Independent)
8. PRECIOUS DEATH — Another Form Of Slavery (Metro One)
9. GODFEAR — What A Sad Sight (Independent)
10. KLANK — Animosity (Tooth & Nail)

Rhythmic

1. GOTEE BROTHERS — Celia (Gotee)
2. GUARDIAN — Bottle Rocket (Myrrh)
3. OUT OF EDEN — More Than You Know (Gotee)
4. WORLD WIDE MESSAGE TRIBE — The Real Thing (Warner Alliance)
5. T-BONE — Keep On Praisin' (Metro One)
6. ECHOING GREEN — Oxygen (Myx)
7. A.J. MORA — I Lift My Hands (nsoul)
8. JESUS MUSIC — One Time Man (441 Music)
9. GRITS — People Noticin' Me (Gotee)
10. E.T.W. — Ain't Nobody Dyin' (But Us) (ForeFront)

Rock

1. BRIDE — The Worm (Organic)
2. ALL STAR UNITED — Smash Hit (Reunion)
3. CAROLYN ARENDS — This I Know (Reunion)
4. THE WAITING — Number 9 (Sparrow)
5. JENI VARNADEAU — I See You (Pamplin)
6. KOSMOS EXPRESS — Beautiful (Sub-Lime)
7. DC TALK — So Help Me God (ForeFront)
8. BETWEEN THIEVES — Despite The Rain (Tattoo)
9. GUARDIAN — Bottle Rocket (Myrrh)
10. CODE OF ETHICS — Shake Me (ForeFront)
11. FOLD ZANDURA — Ember (Sublime)
12. THREE CROSSES — Blind Faith (Benson)
13. AUDIO ADRENALINE — Free Ride (ForeFront)
14. SKILLET — I Can (Ardent/ForeFront)
15. EVERYBODYDUCK — Hair (Rugged/Diadem)

Modern Rock

1. FIVE IRON FRENZY — Where Zero Meets 15 (5 Minute Walk)
2. SKILLET — I Can (Ardent/ForeFront)
3. FOLD ZANDURA — Ember (Sub-Lime)
4. KOSMOS EXPRESS — Beautiful (Sub-Lime)
5. BLEACH — Eleven (ForeFront)
6. HONEY — Blinder (Sublime)
7. BRIDE — The Worm (Organic)
8. PLUMB — Crazy (Essential)
9. BETWEEN THIEVES — Despite The Rain (Tattoo)
10. STARFLYER 59 — The Translator (Tooth & Nail)
11. COMMON CHILDREN — Domesticity (Tattoo)
12. STAVESACRE — An Eclipsing (Tooth & Nail)
13. THE WAITING — Number 9 (Sparrow)
14. EVERYBODYDUCK — Hair (Rugged/Diadem)
15. DRYVE — Nervous (SaraBellum)

modern rock reporters

CKCU 93.1FM — Ottawa, ONT — Sunday 9AM
KADU 90.1FM — Hibbing, MN — 24 Hours
KCLC 89.1FM — St. Charles, MO — Saturday 7PM
WCLW 91.3FM — Worcester, MA — Tuesday 10PM
WITR 89.7FM — Rochester, NY — Friday 10PM
WQKO 91.9FM — Howe, IN — 24 Hours
WUFM 88.7FM — Columbus, OH — 24 Hours

rock reporters

KADU 90.1FM — Hibbing, MN — 24 Hours
KCLC 89.1FM — St. Charles, MO — Saturday 7PM
WAIF 88.3FM — Cincinnati, OH — Saturday 8PM
WITR 89.7FM — Rochester, NY — Friday 10PM
WQFL 100.9FM — Rockford, IL — Saturday 9PM
WQKO 91.9FM — Howe, IN — 24 Hours
WUFM 88.7FM — Columbus, OH — 24 Hours
WVOF 88.5FM — Bridgeport, CT — Sunday 9PM

loud reporters

CFCR 90.5FM — Saskatoon, SASK — Monday 9PM
KCLC 89.1FM — St. Charles, MO — Saturday 7PM
WITR 89.7FM — Rochester, NY — Friday 10PM
WTTU 88.5FM — Nashville, TN — Sunday 7PM
WVOF 88.5FM — Bridgeport, CT — Sunday 9PM

rap/club reporters

WCLW 91.3FM — Worcester, MA — Sunday 4PM
WITR 89.7FM — Rochester, NY — Friday 10PM
WUFM 88.7FM — Columbus, OH — Saturday 7PM

Charts reprinted courtesy of the *Pure Rock Report*, compiled from airplay reports of more than 80 radio stations and programs nationwide. *The Pure Rock Report* is a bi-weekly tip sheet for the Christian rock industry. Contact the PRR at (614) 272-8227 or on the World Wide Web at "http://users.aol.com/theprr."

http://www.7ball.com 7 ball 64 we dig those kookie radio people.

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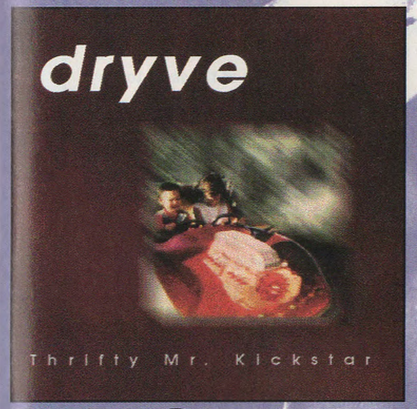
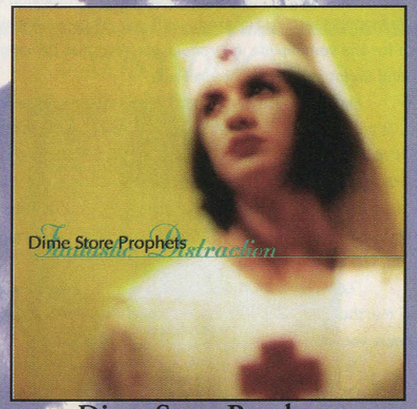
"The Electrics"
July 15, 1997

Rose Blossom Punch
"Ephemere"
September 23, 1997

Model Engine
"The Lean Year's Tradition"
October 7, 1997



Dryve
"Thrifty Mr. Kickstar"



Dime Store Prophets
"Fantastic Distraction"

Sherri Youngward
"Faces, Memories, Places"

5 Minute Walk Team
"Take Time to Listen Vol. III"

"Love God,
Love Others,
Take Time to Listen"

Answer:
We left out the candy coating

Five Iron Frenzy
"Upbeats and Beatdowns"

Back | Reload | Forward | Search | Prefs | Home | Help | Stop

Address

BL@h BL@h BL@h

By Chris Well

I've always been fascinated by the fact that much of the lore from old horror stories has roots in religion. As Mr. Spock pointed out, "All legends are based in some fact."

Now, of course, I'm not talking about those stupid "slash and burn" flicks (oh, yeah, *that's* imaginative). I'm talking about classic monster stories: For example, if you check out Bram Stoker's vision for the vampire life in *Dracula*, you find that Christian symbols and Scripture play an integral role.

Or think about the legend of the "zombie." The walking dead. It's not hard to see a connection with the Bible, either. In fact, the most famous "zombie" might be Lazarus. In the Gospel According to John (chapter 11), the sisters of Lazarus called upon their friend Jesus to come and heal their sick brother. When He did not arrive until after Lazarus had died, the sisters thanked Jesus for coming, but assumed He was too late.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," Martha said. "But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

OK, now she thought He was speaking in the larger sense. "Yes," she said, "when everyone else rises, on resurrection day."

She had forgotten that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Yes, those who have their hope in Christ have a future alive with Christ-but He also had the authority to raise Lazarus right there!

Although the outward appearances may not seem as dramatic, the same Lord has the power to resurrect each of us, as well. We are dead because of sin. We are dead because we live in a culture without God. But there is hope: Colossians 3 talks about a new life we can have in Christ. Like some kind of zombie, we are raised from death.

The members of Audio Adrenaline knew it wasn't enough to simply tell our generation about the new life, they also had to show why it's relevant to the issues that affect us. That's why they spent seven days on the road with seven young adults, talking about the issues that affect us. The results can be surprising. As you'll see on the interactive portion of their AVCD© single "Some Kind of Zombie" and in the upcoming book *Some Kind of Zombie: The Resurrection of a Generation*, these are real people. Drawn from different parts of the country, different social standing, different views about the world and how it works, throughout the conversations they express doubt and insecurity, they express encouragement and enthusiasm ... they laugh and they get upset. It's real.

For the next seven months, *7ball* and our sister magazine RELEASE will devote a page to one of the seven topics discussed: You'll hear different ideas about depression and apathy; tolerance and absolutes; whether the church is a hospital or a country club; the ability to commit to a relationship in today's society; how far you should go to define your individuality; materialism and the definition of success.

Led by road pastor Jim Burgen, from Louisville, Ky., the group of 17-to-21-year-olds gives a well-rounded picture of what members of our generation think. It's a ride that will open some eyes and pierce some hearts. It will also open your world-while there is only one Saviour, there are all different kinds of people in need of a resurrection.

(the wait is over)

LIVE AT THE STRAND

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THIRD DAY

(Turn Your Eyes On Jesus/Can't Help Falling in Love/With or Without You - medley)

LSU

THE PRAYER CHAIN

LOUDFLOWER

AGE OF FAITH

SIXPENCE NONE THE RICHER

SQUAD FIVE-O

DEAR EPHESUS

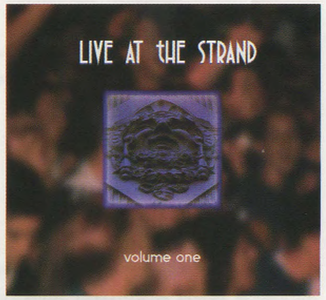
MY FRIEND STEPHANIE

SUNDAYS CHILD

METROPOLITAN

(featuring members of Luxury and Piltdown Man)

LOST DOGS



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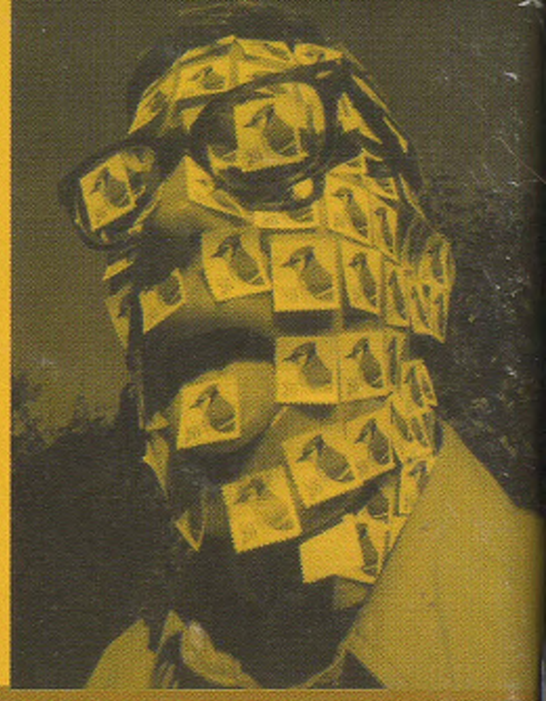

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